



Why Leisure Time is a Thing of the Past

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By [Jeff Davidson](#)

Leisure, as a concept for most physicians, is on the rocks. Surely, it no longer means total hours minus work hours. True leisure time — enjoying a rewarding activity free from work and preoccupation with work — is difficult for many to achieve.

Why leisure time is no longer leisure time

When the shift between a pressure-filled activity and true leisure time is abrupt, the quality of your leisure is likely to suffer.

Is your leisure squeezed between frenzied activities? Strains of the workweek tend to make physicians place great emphasis on their weekends and other days off. They hope to relax, but the pressure is enormous, and often they can't rest even when they've got the hours to do so.

Pressured individuals feel guilty both doing too much and doing too little. They often ask, "Could I have done more?" "Should I have done otherwise?" Even when blessed with leisure, they might not be free to enjoy it.

Physician parents, and parents in general, are often concerned about how much time they spend with their kids. Spouses feel guilty about periods spent away from each other. Pressed and frazzled by the onslaught of responsibilities, more couples are finding it exhausting to have to "be" with one another — to converse, empathize and respond. The inability to be with one another is a yet-to-be-recognized fallout of a time-pressured existence.

The consequences

In this 24/7 world, a cultural inability to relax dogs us and negates many benefits leisure traditionally provided. This, in turn, impacts the quality of our work. Even as more labor-saving and enhanced communication technologies are

introduced, and our output and efficiency rises, our expectations directly increase. We become less satisfied with ourselves for not doing more.

The feeling of no breathing space can quickly pervade all aspects of your life, diminish your happiness and eliminate any joie de vivre. The cycle can get vicious. Lacking a balance between work and play, responsibility and respite, "getting things done" becomes the end-all. You start to function like a human doing instead of a human being. You begin to link successfully executing the items on your growing "to do" list with feelings of worthiness.

As the list keeps growing longer, the lingering sense of more to do infiltrates your sense of harmony and self-acceptance.

How to cope

Remember: Everything on your "to-do" list, even at the workplace, is undertaken at your option. You are not your tasks, they don't define you and they don't constrain you.

On a deeply felt personal level, recognize that from now on you will be subjected to an ever-increasing number of items competing for your attention. You cannot handle everything, nor is making the attempt desirable.

Recognize, with the clarity of death, that life is finite; you can no longer wistfully intake the daily deluge and expect to achieve balance. You cannot submissively yield to the din and settle for living your life in what's left over after each day's onslaught.

Make sensible choices about what is best ignored and what merits your attention.