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# Adults at Play

A LITTLE LEISURE GOES A LONG WAY TOWARD A HEALTHY, WELL-BALANCED LIFE.



All work and no play may make Jack a dull boy but that's not all. It turns out it can also make Jack sick and tired, too. A recent study by researchers at the University of California, Irvine, revealed that people who put in long hours on the job are more likely to suffer from hypertension than those who work regular eight-hour days. In addition, employees who work overtime are far more prone to illness, injury and cardiac arrest. And it may also come as no surprise that women who log longer work weeks tend to smoke and snack more and exercise less.

Can it be that hard labor causes poor health? It doesn't have to, says **E. Christine Moll MS '86, PhD**. A little leisure is all *this* doctor orders.

"Play is as important to a person's health as keeping cholesterol levels in check and getting regular exercise," stresses Moll. An associate professor of counseling and human services at Canisius and part-time professional counselor, Moll teaches students and professionals about the necessity for leisure in their lives. She defines leisure as anything that brings personal enjoyment to individuals and allows them to recharge their batteries.



“Leisure is like medicine. It airs out our brain. It renews our spirit. It gives us clarity of thought. It’s a benefit to our blood pressure. It gives us life satisfaction. For all the dimensions of our lives: our physical, mental, spiritual and cognitive health – leisure time should be a necessity not a luxury.”

Unfortunately, Americans work more hours than ever before and therefore have less time for leisure. In fact, leisure expert and author Juliet B. Schor says U.S. employees work almost 200 more hours a year than they did in 1970. That is equal to about an extra month of work.

“Work is the single activity we do most in our lifetimes. We work more than we sleep or eat,” says Moll. “Our health and medicine are so much more improved than they were a century ago but we’re going to wipe ourselves out because we’re just working, working, working.”

### ALL WORK AND NO PLAY

The all-work-and-no-play mentality may have been passed on to us by our country’s founding fathers, who believed labor to be a blessing because it put the body into God’s productive labor and helped people to avoid temptation. “Productive and prosperous work was evidence that you were saved,” explains **Timothy H. Wadkins, PhD**, associate professor of religious studies and theology. Or perhaps consumerism is also to blame for the trend. “Europeans work to live but Americans live to work,” notes **Howard Stanger, PhD**, associate professor of management/marketing. “The nation’s focus on getting and spending means Americans are more likely to choose wealth over leisure.”

Moll notes that the biggest abusers of the all-work-and-no-play lifestyle are Baby Boomers. “This generation really pushes to gain the

American Dream and thinks nothing of putting in long hours or foregoing vacations for only long weekends,” says Moll. “They often find it hard to put the breaks on, catch their breath and relax.”

Sound familiar?

You’re not alone.

### THE BREAKDOWN OF THE BODY

For most of us, even a snippet of the ideal work-leisure balance is a struggle, says **David L. Farrugia, PhD**, chair of the Counseling and Human Services Department at Canisius and a professional counselor. “The 21st century lifestyle we lead in this country does not allow us to achieve balance easily. We work eight to 10 hours a day, after which we carpool kids around to various activities or help them with homework and then tend to household responsibilities. That leaves precious little time for leisure and the result can be self-destructive.”

Farrugia speaks from experience.

By the time patients come to him, many have already visited their primary doctor for anxiety-like symptoms. Stress is often the culprit.

“Patients are surprised when they hear this,” explains Farrugia. “They’ll say, ‘But I’ve been working 12, 14 or 16-hour days for the last 10 years and it’s never bothered me in the past.’”

Physiologically, notes Farrugia, the body is able to adapt and function at high levels of stress but eventually it begins to take its toll on a person’s mental and physical health. In the professional world this condition is known as general adaptive syndrome (GAS), first identified by Hans Selye, MD, who pioneered stress research and is known internationally



### All Work and No Play

U.S. employees work almost 200 more hours a year than they did in 1970; that is equal to about an extra month of work – Juliet B. Schor, author of *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*

U.S. workers will give back more than 574 million unused vacation days this year and save employers almost \$76 billion – Expedia.com

Forty-three percent (43%) of vacationers will stay tethered to work by the technology of cell phones, E-mail and Blackberry – Steelcase



“It’s like food, you have to taste different things to find your passion.”

– E. Christine Moll, PhD

A photograph of a forest path with a yellow arrow pointing right, overlaid with a text box. The text box contains the title 'How to Tell if Leisure is Lacking in Your Life:' and three bullet points. The background of the image shows a person carrying a yellow kayak on their back, walking away on a dirt path through a wooded area. The image has a red and orange gradient border.

## How to Tell if Leisure is Lacking in Your Life:

- If your daily routine has become too routine
- If you have to think about what you like to do for fun
- If you can't remember the last time you took time for you

as 'the father of the stress field.'

"His observation was that stress followed a progression and can be categorized in three different stages," explains Farrugia.

The first is the early or alarm state. People begin to exhibit anxiety symptoms. They regularly feel revved up and distracted. By the end of the day, headaches and muscle tension are common ailments. "In other words, your body is ringing an alarm saying you're stressed and it's beginning to affect your body," says Farrugia. "Still, most of us live with this and adapt to it."

The second stage of GAS is the resistance state, in which people's behaviors become noticeably different. "They are more moody, less enthusiastic about work or other activities. They start to withdraw from friends and family. Sleep and eating patterns can also be affected."

The third and final stage is the exhaustive state, literally meaning the body is physically exhausted from functioning under such a high level of stress for so long. "The body is like a car. If you drive moderately, you only have to get your car serviced every 5,000 miles or so. But if you continually drive at high speeds, like a race car, it's going to break down. Under high levels of prolonged stress, the body does the same thing. It begins to breakdown physiologically, and that affects our immune system and ability to fight disease."

If the physical concerns aren't enough to provoke you to put play into your life, consider the long term benefits of leisure.

### LEISURE ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

"People who nurture leisure activities throughout their lives have a much healthier outlook physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and in

their sense of selves," says **Summer M. Reiner MS '00**. Currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Connecticut, the Canisius alumna is a former student of Moll's. Under her guidance, Reiner has examined the pivotal role leisure can play throughout a person's lifespan.

She found, for example, that children who actively participate in leisure activities tend to grow into confident, active and satisfied adults. "Extra-curricular activities for school-aged children contribute a lot towards their development," says Reiner, whose research was published in *Counseling Today* magazine. "They stay out of trouble. They tend to be more excited about school. They have higher grades. They gain confidence. They enhance their social, physical and intellectual skills. Overall, they exhibit better mental health."

They also learn where their interests lie and that can be useful for parents and teachers.

"If we can help young people identify what they like doing for leisure, we can help them turn those interests into productive careers," says Moll.

But much like their Baby Boomer parents, today's young working adults can easily fall into the trap of not leaving themselves enough free time. Reiner's advice: If leisure doesn't come naturally to you, then schedule it on your calendar.

"At this stage, leisure is about keeping lives balanced to experience some personal enjoyment." At the same time, it promotes affiliation, and assists adults in discovering their competencies and self-expression. Many of these benefits often spill over into a person's profession and make for a more satisfying work life. Reiner's research also found that parents who nurture their leisure lives tend to manage stress better and are more prepared to handle 'empty nest syndrome.' Equally important is



## Looking for Leisure?

Want to put leisure back into your life but forgot what you like to do for fun? The answers may be found in your youth. Simply consider the following questions, recommended by E. Christine Moll, PhD, to learn how your childhood pastimes may be modified into play for today.

- What was a fun thing you really enjoyed doing when you were five years old? Besides the “play” of it, what did the activity “do” for you?
- What was a fun thing you really enjoyed doing when you were 10 years old? Besides the “play” of it, what did the activity “do” for you?
- What was a fun thing you really enjoyed doing when you were 15 years old? Besides the “play” of it, what did the activity “do” for you?

*Continue to go through life in five-year increments and reflect about the meaning behind those various activities. Then consider how you might repeat those activities or modify them to fit into your life today.*

that parental leisure promotes family stability and serves as a model for a healthy, balanced lifestyle for children.

“Children who witness their parents enjoying hobbies and activities outside of work grow up to value the benefits of leisure themselves.” But, Reiner warns, parents should not trick themselves into thinking their children’s activities count for their own leisure. “Many parents say *that’s* their enjoyment, watching their child’s baseball or soccer games. But that is an aspect of parenting, not leisure. Parents need to develop their own leisure interests.”

These interests will help older adults live healthy, productive lives past retirement. Without the responsibilities of a job or children, it’s common for people at this stage of life to experience an identity crisis. But Reiner says that retirees who embrace leisure throughout their lives are less likely to lose that sense of self when they stop working. For those who stay active throughout their Golden Years, leisure provides structure to what appears to be an unstructured day. “It keeps them more mentally aware, emotionally connected and physically capable. Their pastimes give them a sense of independence and competency, even as they may be losing some of their other skills.”

And what happens if certain skills start to deteriorate? That’s no excuse for putting off a little play, says Moll. “Play is adaptable.”

Moll uses her own father as an example. S. Stewart “Stew” Moll was in his 80s when he decided to revive his golf game. He teamed up with men who were half his age for some regular time on the links. Because Stew couldn’t walk well or bend over he relied on his fellow players to tee up his ball and pick it up for him. “He would shuffle from the golf cart to the tee, like Tim Conway used to,” laughs Moll, referring to the

old man character Conway portrayed on “The Carol Burnett Show.” Once Stew hit the ball – “never very far,” recalls Moll – a teammate would retrieve it and then drive him to chipping distance to putt out. “It gave him the chance to play a little golf, certainly not the way he used to but that didn’t bother him,” says Moll. “He adapted the game to fit his needs and his pace in life, and that’s what everyone needs to do if they want to put leisure in their lives.”

But where does one start?

### WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?

First, you should determine how much leisure is lacking in your life. According to Moll, if you can’t remember the last time you took time just for you, it’s time for a change.

“What have you done for yourself, lately,” asks Moll. “When was the last time you did something just for fun or just for the health of it? If your answer is ‘I read a book a year ago,’ then you need to do more. Whether it’s cooking, needlework, golfing or whatever, put leisure into your life. It’s important.”

### RECREATION IS RE-CREATION

Once you commit to making a change, it’s time to reconnect with your favorite pastimes. Not surprising, many people are so far removed from recreation they have forgotten what they once enjoyed. If you fit this profile, Moll recommends a few things: Spend time at the library to find out where your interests lie. Stroll the aisles at craft or sporting good

stores for promising new hobbies. Talk with people about what they like to do for fun. "It's like food, you have to taste different things to find your passion." Perhaps, though, the greatest indicator of your leisure interests as an adult can be found in your youth. Moll states, "The whole idea of recreation is re-creation."

For Moll, the joy and freedom her bicycle provided in her younger years set the stage for leisure later in life. "It gave me a chance to go beyond my block." When she turned 17, Moll traded in her bicycle for a new 'set of wheels' – a car. "The car provided the same satisfaction my bike did. It gave me a chance to go beyond my boundaries and explore new roads." Today, Moll considers travel among the many leisurely activities she enjoys, along with walking, listening to music, reading "mindless novels" and relaxing by the Jersey shore.

"If you can recall the activities you enjoyed in your youth and determine what those needs fulfilled in you, then you can begin to think about how those needs can be met in the here and now (see Looking for Leisure, page 14)," says Reiner, whose leisure interests include dancing because it enables her to practice, perfect and perform. "It's really the theme behind the activity that you want to consider."

With this in mind, leisure can include anything from a crossword puzzle to a pickup game of basketball, as long as it fits the following criteria: The activity must be freely chosen by the participant; provide satisfaction and adventure; arouse interest; require a commitment; serve as a sense of separation or escape; and most important, be pleasurable.

Moll warns that competition is not part of the leisure game. "If you didn't win that tennis match or were only able to bike two miles instead of three, that's ok. What is important is that you're relaxing. But if you

get so wrapped up in winning that your blood pressure goes up or you make others around you miserable, that's not leisure. Yes, you can be sweaty or exhausted when you're finished doing whatever you were doing but for the purpose of being helpful, leisure needs to be restful."

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Leisure also needs to be practiced, practiced, practiced. Unfortunately, too many of us don't recognize an opportunity to relax when it comes along. But a little downtime gives our brains a much-needed break.

"Leisure is a lot like having a 'runner's high,'" Moll explains. "Our endorphins kick in, our heart rate changes, our blood pressure changes and our emotional well-being gets a time out." She notes, a little personal play time can also go along way in our relationships. "I tell my (counseling) students this all the time: We can't give what we don't have. We can't give to our family, friends, students or clients if we don't first take some time for ourselves."

So the next time you find yourself with a few minutes to spare, resist the temptation to cross another task off your to-do list. Instead, take a time-out from life and enjoy a little leisure. It may be all the medicine you need for a more well-balanced and well-rounded life.

"It doesn't matter what you do or that you may not do it well. Just start slowly and fake it until you make it," exclaims Moll. "The point is to get out there, relax and appreciate the grandeur of the world once in a while. Play with abandon. Live life with intention. And be gentle with yourself."

You heard her – it's doctor's orders. □



Summer M. Reiner MS '00

## Leisure Checklist

To fit the definition of leisure, activities must:

- Be freely chosen by the participant
- Provide satisfaction
- Arouse interest
- Include a sense of adventure
- Require commitment
- Enable separation or escape
- Be pleasurable



### E. Christine Moll, PhD

- Associate Professor, Counseling & Human Services
- Professional, part-time counselor
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- NYCA Representative to North Atlantic Region of American Counseling Association (ACA)
- North Atlantic Region Representative to ACA Governing Council
- Former director of Canisius College Counseling Center (1987-1996)
- Past president of the Association for Adult Development and Aging (division of the American Counseling Association)
- Past President of WNY Counseling Association



E. Christine Moll MS '86, PhD