

June 2004 News Tips

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A vacation can empty one's mind to make way for new things

Taking a vacation – getting away from work and your everyday schedule – is not just a fun diversion. It's *essential* for mental health and creativity, says Dr. Ann Matt Maddrey, assistant professor of psychiatry at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

"We typically think of a vacation as a period of rest and relaxation," she says. "But if you look at the word 'vacate,' it means to 'leave' or 'empty out' – as in empty one's mind of your normal routine, to make way for other things.

"Sometimes we get so stressed that we don't take time to recharge. When a battery runs down, there's no energy left; it needs to be recharged. That's exactly what happens to people."

Whether you leave town or stay at home, vacations offer a chance to increase creativity, see different things and different people, and take oneself away from life's daily grind, Dr. Maddrey says. And vacations don't have to cost a fortune.

"Take a virtual vacation," she says. "Decide what kind of vacation you want and replicate it at home. Home can be a haven and safe place where you can recharge as well.

"Vacations are *NOT* a waste of time. You can't give what you don't have. You will do a much better job and have new ideas when you return."

Media Contact: Donna Steph Hansard

With ozone pollution on the way, know when to stay indoors

Summer is on its way – along with more sunlight that can instigate chemical reactions in the atmosphere.

That means more days with high-levels of ozone pollution. Doctors advise that children, older adults and people with asthma or other lung conditions should stay indoors during red or purple ozone-alert days.

"Recent studies suggest that chronic ozone exposure may contribute to lung disease and trigger asthma attacks," says Dr. Carlos Girod, associate professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. "Studies in animals suggest that repeated exposure to ozone alters lung development and may cause chronic lung disease."

The worst times are between 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. when ozone generation is highest. Even healthy adults should avoid exercising during these hours.

Media Contact: Steve O'Brien

How women may reduce the number of daily bathroom trips

Women who use the bathroom more than normal – or more often than eight times in a 24-hour period – may want to consider cutting back on diet soda, says Dr. Mikio Nihira, assistant professor of urogynecology and pelvic reconstructive surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

“Caffeine, carbonation and sugar substitutes can irritate the bladder and make some women feel like they need to urinate or, worse, like they are having trouble holding it,” he says.

“Our list of bladder irritants is growing,” Dr. Nihira says. “For many women, reducing their intake of diet soda is very helpful.”

Media Contact: Staishy Bostick Siem

Take time to properly prepare your pre-made dinners

In today's fast-paced, convenience-oriented society, grabbing pre-made dinners to take home and ordering food to be delivered are on the rise. Or if we do still cook in our own kitchens, we tend to prepare enough to reheat the next day.

This recent trend toward “heat and eat” could be dangerous if leftover items or pre-cooked foods aren't reheated to the proper temperature, says Lona Sandon, a registered dietitian and assistant professor of clinical nutrition at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

“Most of us only reheat food in the microwave until it feels warm to the touch or tastes hot, but this is not the best way to know if you've heated foods thoroughly,” she said. “Reheated food should reach a temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.”

How do you tell? “The best idea is to purchase a food thermometer – which can be inexpensive and work in the microwave – and test foods, particularly when they are high protein or meat items. Those are the riskiest.”

On a similar note, refrigerator temperatures should range between 32 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit for proper cold storage, and can be measured by placing a thermometer inside. “Above 40 degrees, there is more bacteria growth and could put food in the danger zone,” she says.

Media Contact: Donna Steph Hansard

Be a lifesaver – give blood, and get the feeling of satisfaction

When it comes to saving a life, one of the easiest ways is by donating blood. Unfortunately, few people do. In fact, only about 5 percent of eligible Americans give blood, according to the American Association of Blood Banks.

"There are several benefits derived from donating blood," says Dr. Ravi Sarode, associate professor of pathology and director of the Transfusion Medicine and Coagulation Laboratory at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. "Most important is the feeling of satisfaction of helping three people with one donation, who could be a newborn, a small child receiving cancer treatment and an elderly woman getting hip replacement surgery that requires a blood transfusion."

Volunteers are the only source of blood, as no artificial blood exists.

Millions of pints of donated blood are used each year to treat surgical patients, organ transplant recipients, accident victims and others. But the red blood cells, platelets and plasma have a limited shelf life. Red blood cells can be stored for six weeks and plasma frozen for a year, while platelets last only five days.

"People can donate blood every eight weeks and platelets every four weeks," says Dr. Sarode.

Individuals who want to donate should contact a local blood supplier (American Red Cross or Carter BloodCare) for an appointment. Donors must be healthy, age 17 or older, weigh at least 110 pounds and meet other requirements.

Media Contact: Scott Maier

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