

“Take Five” to Simplify Your Life

Far from being selfish or irresponsible, taking time for yourself on a regular basis can make you a better parent, spouse, worker—and a happier person as well. When you take five to do something you like, however, brain chemicals such as serotonin and endorphins are released, triggering feelings of well-being. Increased demands on the job and at home have made managing work and family life increasingly difficult for all. Although originally considered just a woman's issue, research indicates that men are as likely as women to have difficulty managing work-family demands.

In her research on dual-career couples, Dr. Denise Skinner, professor of Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin, found that there are distinct differences in how men and women use downtime. Men spend their downtime doing what they want, and don't worry about it. Women typically use downtime to become more organized. According to Skinner, "Men possess more of a sense of entitlement when it comes to time for themselves whereas women tend to feel guilty if they take a few hours off from their responsibilities".

How to Simplify

How do we break the spell and accept the invitation to a freer life-style? Simplification is the key. You can choose to be "Fast and Furious" or "Slow and Easy." You must first let go of the attitudes that continually deny your health and happiness in an effort to be responsible. The important thing is to keep working on simplifying your life and finding ways to keep it simple.

Try simplifying your work and/or home life with these techniques:

- Set realistic goals; simplify your expectations. Life is filled with foibles, flaws, and imperfections.
- Mark one day off your calendar a month to "catch up."
- Give yourself permission to play; schedule "Joy Breaks"—fun in small doses. Get as good at planning fun as you are now at scheduling work.
- Blend rewarding work with time for personal refreshment.
- Schedule a breather. If you live by a calendar, schedule one hour a day to allow some breathing space. "Take Five" for yourself. Five minutes away from your work area can have a dramatic effect on your productivity.
- Schedule time to work on specific projects. Give yourself time to work on these things by scheduling work time in your calendar.
- De-clutter. Divide your desk or room at home into sections. Pick one section and start de-cluttering. Try handling things only once. Use three boxes or bags, marking them: Keep, Give Away, and Toss.
- Delegate. Stop trying to do everything yourself. Let your spouse and children help with family responsibilities.
- Rid yourself of old commitments and goals. Stop to think about everything you're doing or working towards. Does it still fit your life today? If not, stop doing it or get rid of it as a goal.
- Take a "well" day. Enjoy doing what you enjoy the most.
- Take a 1-minute speed whine. Find a friend, set a timer, and take turns whining about everything you can fit into 1 minute. If you whine fast enough, you'll end up laughing—the best stress-buster of all.

For most of us, work is an inescapable fact of life—it is the way we obtain the physical necessities of existence. However, everyone needs to renew, recharge, and relax. Only by breaking the chains of busyness can we escape the prison of status quo and experience life. You don't need to set aside hours to reap the benefits of "Taking Five"—try building little blocks of fun into your day. *"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."*