

life has to offer, a surprising number of people are reluctant to take time out from work. Recent research shows one in five people in Ireland do not take their full [annual leave entitlement](#). And in the UK, [two in five](#) workers have taken less leave in recent years as a result of the pandemic.

It is important to take [time](#) out from work in order to fully live our lives, but there are several issues that can discourage us from taking annual leave. Some people have doubts about whether taking time out will allow for full [psychological detachment](#) from work, for example. The fear that thoughts of work will invade our minds encourages many people to just keep working. A common trend among those who are obsessively [passionate](#) about their work, these feelings can become overbearing, controlling their thoughts and making them unable to temporarily forget about work.

Another reason people do not take time off is because they do not expect to [feel relaxed](#) while on holidays. This may be due to their circumstances or choices made about how to spend time off. In particular, family holidays may generate a lot of conflict, sometimes becoming even [more stressful than work](#). It's unsurprising then that staying on at work instead of taking time out may be tempting for many.

Alternatively, some people fear the [financial consequences](#) of annual leave. Holidays are expensive, especially for large families, leading many to forgo their leave entitlement to save money.

Benefits of annual leave

These are just some examples of why people may avoid holidays, but regardless of the reason, taking time off—especially from demanding jobs—has immediate benefits in terms of decreasing stress and [burnout](#). These benefits are only temporary, with stress often climbing again shortly after returning to work. As such, regular respites throughout the

year can help achieve the accumulative benefits of annual leave on health.

The good news is that taking time out for a week to two weeks is [enough](#) to recover and experience a boost of positive emotions. This will begin to decline as the time off comes to an end, but still offers the break needed to recharge your batteries.

Annual leave is also [beneficial for employers](#), as it improves employee productivity by up to 40%, reduces the likelihood of sick leave by 28%, and boosts creativity and mental health. Taking time out is also essential for [parents](#), as their children gain immense benefits from spending more time together.

Getting the best from annual leave

While these figures may have you reaching for your phone to search for package deals, the spike in [travel disruption](#) this summer may put you off from searching for the farthest-flung destination. But you don't need expensive foreign holidays to enjoy annual leave. Here are three vacation [activities](#) that can improve wellbeing, whether you are away or on a staycation:

1. Practice relaxation

Relaxation can involve simple [breathing practice](#) that can help reduce anxiety. An alternative that can have similar benefits is to use meditation techniques such as [mindfulness](#).

2. Spend time in nature

When on annual leave, try to spend as much time as you can in nature

because it is associated an improvement in both [emotional and psychological](#) health. It doesn't matter what you do when enjoying nature; you can be active, for example walking, running, gardening, or simply sitting on a park bench or spending time sky-gazing.

3. Engage your brain

Take time off as an opportunity to develop your interests. If you love reading, plan to read a few books over the [holiday](#). Research shows these activities [support our minds](#) and our moods, [regardless of age](#). There are additional benefits if you help your [children enjoy books](#) over the summer.

Alternatively, if you enjoy listening to music, take this time to dust off your CDs or rearrange your digital music library. Share music, play an instrument, write lyrics, dance or even just [listen to](#) as much music as you can to improve your physical and mental health.

These are just a few ideas. What's most important is to do something that engages your mind, helps you forget about your job and allows for a respite before you return to work feeling happier and more energised than before.

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