

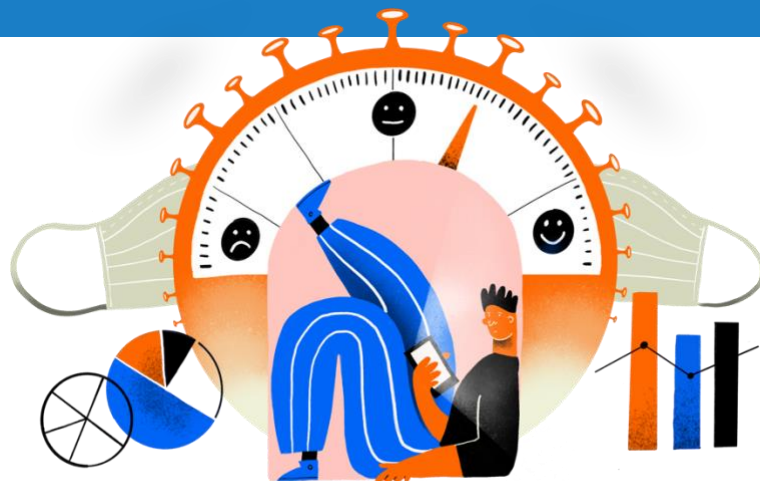
# REPORT 10

## What makes for an energizing and worthwhile summer vacation in corona times?

### The Motivation Barometer

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*Summer vacation is just around the corner. Many of us are eagerly looking forward to it. We need it, because the corona crisis demanded a lot of attention and energy. For some of us, corona fatigue has left its mark. At the same time, the virus could potentially complicate our vacation plans. The summer of 2020 will therefore be different from other summers. To recover from this intense period, to oxygenate our socially pressured relationships, and to be resilient to uncertain times in the fall, it is important to recharge our energy reservoirs during the vacations, both physically and psychologically. Even though some people have smaller budget or less days off due to corona, and even if we have to comply with the corona measures, it's good to get that vacation feeling. But what is a satisfying vacation that gives us a mental boost? The expert group 'psychology & corona' has formulated a series of recommendations on how you can enjoy a refreshing and valuable summer vacation in times of corona, at home or abroad.*

## Guide to your vacation planning

As you make summer plans, it's good to look back at past summers and ask yourself when you had a great summer. The following two questions can help you making vacation plans:

1. What summer activities make you feel good? What is invigorating and vitalizing for you? Vitality refers to the experience of "enthusiasm, vibrancy, and energy" (p. 159, Ryan et al., 2010). The more vital you feel, the less prone you are to physical complaints and ailments. One person gets energy from strolling around a small village, another person from spending time together with the children or grandchildren. Some like to go out with friends in nature or in the city, others find summer the ideal time to do chores or garden.
2. But your 'usual', energizing summer activities may not be feasible during this corona vacation. In order to know better how to organize your vacation anno 2020, it is good to reflect on what you find valuable. What goals would you like to achieve during this vacation, what exactly do you expect from it? If you are aware of what you find important, you can better think of alternative vacation plans that match your values. One person values rest and relaxation, another values social contact and hospitality, yet another is looking for adventure or culture.

## Virtuous and valuable activities

As many summer activities fall away, such as going to a festival or a trip abroad, this summer also offers opportunities for new experiences. At the same time, the loss or change of established habits can also bring uncertainty. We are losing grip. As a source of inspiration for appropriate vacation plans, we list several types of activities of which research has shown a potential energizing effect or increase in your well-being. This is important because not all activities strengthen our mental health and not all values have been shown to equally promote our growth.

**Recommendation 1:** Find connection with nature. A great way to recharge your energy reservoirs is to spend time in nature (Kaplan, 1995; Ryan et al., 2010). You don't necessarily have to be physically active to experience its beneficial effects. It is enough to sit in your garden chair enjoying the budding flowers, in a park enjoying the splendor of trees, or on a bench enjoying a rolling landscape. Being active in nature, such as gardening, walking, playing or doing sports, provides an additional boost. For example, with an initiative such as "Welcome to my garden" - people with gardens offer free camping space - people help each other to have a "green vacation" close to home. Moreover, it is a cheap vacation alternative if you have suffered financially due to the corona crisis.

**Recommendation 2:** Invest time in your hobbies. When you do something you enjoy doing, it energizes you. Hobbies are prime examples of intrinsically motivating activities (Vansteenkiste & Soenens, 2015). Although we are spontaneously attracted to them, fascinating and fun activities can get covered in a thick layer of dust due to corona problems. Therefore, try to make extra time for them this vacation season. Young people may enjoy skating or kicking a ball around together. Older people may like to play cards or petanque. If you like to soak up culture, this is the ideal time to visit museums, get lost in cities or read a book.

**Recommendation 3:** Maintain and deepen your relationships. By being with your closest family or friends and making time for each other, you experience connection. Group activities such as team sports, youth clubs, or a street theatre performance also create social connection. That sense of connection is essential to our physical and mental well-being (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys et al, 2018). Due to the corona measures, some have had to miss each other, for example grandparents their grandchildren, and others may have been too close together, such as adolescents in lockdown with their parents. Even this summer, not everyone will be able to see each other again, think of all the children with grandparents in a country to which we are not yet allowed or dare to travel, for example. This makes it even more important than usual to continue nurturing those relationships this summer.

**Recommendation 4:** Make connection with each other, even physically. Many of us missed hugs, being able to give each other a kiss, touching each other. Especially for singles or those who went through the lockdown alone, that loss may have been intense. Giving your partner or friend a massage can be a good way to compensate for 'skin cravings' (i.e. the craving for meaningful physical touch). Touching has a stress-reducing effect and creates a sense of well-being. Even small touches (such as a pat on the back) have a positive effect. Sex also contributes to good mental and physical health, so enjoy yourself and each other. However, any physical contact can also be a risk. So, remember the basic rules: wash your hands regularly and avoid physical contact when you notice possible symptoms of COVID-19 in yourself or the other person.

**Recommendation 5:** Try something new. By exploring the world around you and trying new things, you do often come up with surprising insights and experiences. Try a new recipe on your BBQ; bike along a different route to a familiar place, or try a new sport. Experimenting with new things doesn't have to cost a lot of money, either. For example, you can borrow a board game you don't already know from neighbours or from the library. Although people differ in their innovativeness and some of us are true creatures of habit, gaining new experiences can strengthen your mental health (Gonzalez-Cutre et al., 2020).

**Recommendation 6:** Try to exercise regularly. Regular exercise makes it easier for us to handle stressful situations and makes us feel less rushed: we feel more in control of everything (Teychenne et al, 2020). For this, you don't have to suddenly start exercising like crazy if you don't like it. Even lighter forms of exercise such as going for a walk, swimming, cycling with a friend, or even just playing ping-pong or a game with the (grand)children, ensure better mental health. What makes us feel especially good is to exercise regularly in a way that you enjoy and when you feel like it.

**Recommendation 7:** Do something for another person. Being helpful and helping others in need makes you feel connected to others and better realize your values (Schwartz, 2010). In this way, you not only strengthen the mental health of the person being helped but also that of the helper. We have seen many examples of mutual aid and spontaneous solidarity in corona times. This summer break, more people are staying closer to home, so there are plenty of opportunities to get involved in your community or neighbourhood. For example, neighbours in several communities organize 'play streets' where children play together safely during the summer weeks. Or you can volunteer for 'summer schools' that help children who need it to catch up. It is crucial, however, that this helpfulness be voluntary in nature, gratuitous. If you help the other out of guilt or because you were still in debt, in short, because you have to, you won't benefit as strongly.

## The 'pause button' gives access to our internal compass

One danger in making vacation plans is planning it too full. Unfilled days or dayparts create a sense of freedom and carefree enjoyment. With a full schedule, you leave little room for surprises. With many festivals, public events, or distant travels having been removed from the calendar, there is a gap in the summer schedule for some. This is a relief. On the other hand, for some, the less visible telecommuting, evening work with children in bed, filling in for sick colleagues, and the daily improvisation of not dropping any stitches at work in recent months has made the distinction between work and leisure a bit lost.

After this eventful period, it is more helpful than ever to banish an overly full to-do list and hit the pause button. Rest also allows you to give the events of the past few months a

place. Our persistence and patience have been tested and many have had quite a rough time. By giving yourself the necessary rest, you can take more psychological distance from the intense, hectic period. This allows us to see things more in perspective. Dare to be vulnerable instead of pretending to be stronger than necessary or hiding negative emotions. When we ourselves dare to discuss what we have missed and what was difficult, we come closer to what really touches us in life: which values are really important (e.g. health, intimacy)? What fun things did I really miss (e.g., leisure activities)? What powerful relationships have been necessarily on the back burner? The vacations are an ideal time to recharge, to get closer to our internal compass and to each other. This increased awareness of our core values, interests, and relationships allows us to stay truer to ourselves and our values. The corona summer break can be a steppingstone to greater authenticity and connection.

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