



Vacation Health Effect Fact Sheet

Americans are known for being tied to their work.

- Out of 21 developed nations, the United States is the only one to not have federally mandated time off.¹
- At the end of 2013, American workers left an average of 12 vacation days unused, which was up from 9.2 in 2012.²
- 3 out of 5 Americans are doing some form of their jobs (accepting phone calls, doing work remotely, checking emails, etc.) when they do take vacations.³

This poor work/life balance of American workers is taking a toll.

- In 2013, 83% of Americans reported feeling stressed at work, up from 73% in 2012.⁴
- Middle-aged men who skip vacations for five consecutive years are 30% more likely to suffer heart attacks than those who take at least one week off a year. Even foregoing vacation for one year raises the risk.⁵
- Additionally, women who take a vacation only once every six years are nearly 8 times more likely to develop heart disease, or have a heart attack, versus those who take at least two vacations a year.⁶
- Dr. Sarah Speck, a Seattle-area cardiologist, finds workplace stress has become a major cause of heart disease in those in their 40s and 50s.¹⁸
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the average American employee now works 160 hours (one month) more each year than in 1976. And job-related stress contributes to absenteeism, lost productivity, and health issues, and these factors cost businesses approximately \$344 billion annually.¹³

Despite these findings, HR professionals know that it is important for employees to take vacation.

- 94% of HR professionals believe that taking vacation is important to employee performance, 92% believe it helps morale and wellness, 90% believe vacations are important to productivity and a positive workplace culture, and 88% believe that vacation time helps them to retain good employees.⁷
- More than two thirds of HR professionals believe that if employees took *more* vacation time, they would be more satisfied in their jobs, perform better, and be more productive.⁸

However, until 401(play)[™] was introduced, there were not many opportunities for employers and HR professionals to encourage employees to actually use their vacation days.

- Vacation time is a “use it or lose it” benefit at most companies, and increasingly, many employees find themselves on the losing side of that equation.¹²
- Even when Americans have vacation time, they are scared to take it – often because they are afraid their bosses will think they’re lazy or that they could lose their jobs while on vacation.²⁰



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Employees who do make it a point to vacation are proven to be more productive, experience less job stress, and are healthier.

- Ernst and Young found that for each additional 10 hours of vacation employees took, their year-end performance ratings from supervisors had improved by 8%. Also, those who took more frequent vacations were less likely to leave the firm.⁹
- When workers take vacations, they are able to alleviate job stress.¹⁰
- Vacations are important to enriching and strengthening relationships, which in turn leads to happier employees, lower stress and anxiety, and a boost to one's mental and physical health.¹¹
- University of Pittsburgh Mind-Body Center researchers found that vacation contributed to a more positive mindset and dramatically lower levels of clinical depression and that mental health is a crucial part of fighting disease.¹⁴

Inspiring employees to improving their social, physical and mental health is a growing trend in developing a positive and healthier workplace culture, and encouraging them to use their paid vacation days is a key to success.

- Based on the benefits it confers and the consequences of skipping it, vacation, often considered an indulgence, needs to be rethought as a basic right and a priority, just like saving for retirement, exercising, and getting a yearly physical.¹⁵
- Large companies such as Accessibility Partners, IBM, Hubspot, GoHealthInsurance.com and Netflix are starting to encourage and reward their staff to take vacations.¹⁶
- Congressman Alan Grayson, (D-FL 9th District) has introduced legislation, 'Paid Vacation Act' (H.R. 2096) that mandates paid time off for workers because "Requiring paid vacation leave will allow workers to spend more time with their families, improve their mental and physical health, and ultimately be more productive in their workplace."¹⁹
- Johnson & Johnson estimates that wellness programs have cumulatively saved the company \$250 million on health care costs over the past decade; from 2002 to 2008, the return was \$2.71 for every dollar spent.¹⁶



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