

**STAYCATIONS ARE MORE POPULAR THAN EVER
PLUS, HAVE GREAT BENEFITS BESIDES SAVING MONEY**
Learn How To Make Your Family Staycation Not Only Fun, But Healthy

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Staycation—a made up word—has become part of our vernacular. Everyone *needs* down time, however, it may have become hard to justify spending money on fun and relaxation, especially if you are having trouble making ends meet in the down economy. So, while the stress and worry of everyday life are very real and must be dealt with, there is nothing wrong with turning off the everyday, taking a mental break and escaping for a little fun. Plus, you may find that taking time to re-energize will make dealing with the demands of life a little easier.

Saving money is definitely a benefit of taking a staycation, but it is not the only positive association with the trend. Staycations can actually be less stressful than a busy, full-blown, weeklong family vacation out of town. You don't have to pack suitcases (or unpack); you don't have to find a pet or plant sitter; you don't have to worry about transportation delays or road construction; you don't have to leave your house unattended; and you spend less time "getting there" and more time "being there." Planning and preparing for a trip that is just as fast-paced as your life can actually have an opposite effect on your intended outcome—you end up needing a vacation from your vacation.

So, while saving money is certainly an incentive, ultimately, you may get more of what you want—relaxing down time—by staying home.

First Things First

There are some ground rules to consider if you've decided to take a family or personal staycation. They will make your time at home more relaxing and fun.

First, unplug. Turn off the cell or smart phone and the computer. Sound hard? Maybe, but if you are serious about relaxing and getting away from the demands of everyday life, it's necessary. If you must, check messages or emails at night, but don't call everyone back. In fact, let your friends, clients and family know you're on vacation and you'll catch up with voicemails and emails the following week.

Second, get your chores, housework and laundry finished so you don't feel the need to do it during your staycation. You can get back to your normal routine the following week. Consider stopping your mail for the week too, just like you're away, so you are free from paperwork.

Finally, do *some* pre-planning. If it's just you, you may want to take each day as it comes, but if you have a family, they may get bored pretty quickly if nothing is on the agenda. Consider letting everyone pick a close-by destination they want to visit. If you have too many, put them in a hat and draw out two or three. However, be sure to balance your week with some down time too.

Healthy Staycation Ideas

Encouraging a mental break from your everyday world is a must for your overall health and wellness. When you are planning things to do on your staycation, consider healthy activities that are fun and family oriented. This will not only make everyone feel better, but maybe jumpstart some new healthy habits that will extend beyond your staycation.

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The following are some terrific ideas to consider doing during your staycation:

- Explore the outdoors; the options are endless—biking, hiking, walking, boating, flying a kite, or spending the day at a local park, and enjoy a healthy picnic.
- Organize a field day for your family at the park—plan games, award prizes, pack a healthy picnic lunch—and spend the day being together and having fun.
- Visit a cultural or educational spot you’ve wanted to see but just couldn’t fit into your schedule—a museum, a historic site, the zoo—check your local visitor’s bureau or chamber for other ideas.
- Some useful local Web sites to search for activities include:
 - www.tricountychamber.com
 - www.readingberkspa.com
 - www.missionhealthyliving.org
 - www.valleyforge.org
 - www.brandywinevalley.com
- Go camping in your own backyard.
- Create a scavenger hunt for your kids around the neighborhood—or better yet for the whole family—so that you have to get in the car and hunt around town.
- Try activities you usually don’t get to do as a family because you’re busy with things you “have” to do—go bowling, play laser tag, go miniature golfing or go-carting, head to an amusement park.
- Try making some fun and healthy recipes in the kitchen; everyday life can prevent you from feeding your family healthy meals—take your staycation time to cook healthy and involve the family.
- Plant a garden or a container garden—choose vegetables, herbs or flowers.
- Finish that craft project, home project, or book. Go get that massage, or dig out your golf clubs out and use them.

Ultimately, whatever you do during your time off, be sure it relaxes and rejuvenates you. If what you’re doing or where you’re going contributes to your stress level or makes you tense, strongly consider not doing it. Try the alternative. Spend some time in your own home, visit and explore your city, but most of all take the time to do something just for you that you fully enjoy. Now *that’s* a vacation.

About the Foundation The Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation’s mission is to enhance the health and wellness of area residents, providing education, funding and programs that motivate people to adopt healthy lifestyles. Visit www.pottstownfoundation.org for more information about the Foundation. Discover Pottstown area’s new online community at www.missionhealthyliving.org to learn and share great information on how to lead a healthier life! You can also follow Mission Healthy Living on Facebook and Twitter.