

How business owners can stop getting sick on holidays

By [Andrew May](#) on January 15, 2021



For many small businesses right now, their people are at high risk of getting sick, and I'm not referring to catching coronavirus. It's the type of sickness you get when your immune system is run down and when you finally do slow down, your body has a way of balancing everything out by forcing you to rest and take it easy.

There are several convergent factors at play. Firstly, many businesses have been forced to lay people off or keep staff on reduced hours, meaning the few remaining have to pick up the slack and [work longer hours](#). Add to this, working from home has blurred the boundaries for many, obliterating their work/life balance, people are typically [drinking more](#) during the pandemic and the ongoing uncertainty is resulting in elevated stress levels for many people.

When they finally stop, it may be a time many people crash. But why do we tend to crash after holidays, big projects, or big upheavals in our lives?

To explain this phenomenon, Dutch psychologist Ad Vingerhoets and his colleagues from Tilburg University in Holland interviewed 1,128 men and 765 women and they coined the term 'Leisure Sickness.'

Ad Vingerhoets found "likely candidates are people who are consumed with work, who have demanding and high-stress positions, and who have trouble making the transition between a work and non-work environment."

Looking through the microscope

Dr Tom Buckley is an Associate Professor in the Critical/Acute Care teaching and research team at the University of Sydney, and Director of the Strive Stronger Research Institute.

He explains that the phenomenon is "not fully understood by many", in part because the immune system is so complex. Dr Buckley explains that "psychological stress is associated with mobilisation of white blood cells, which work to fight off infection. At the same time, elevated stress hormones affect our immune system and results in a scenario where white blood cells are unable to be fully effective in defending the body from infection."

"Initially cortisol inhibits aspects of inflammation, but if cortisol persists, we then become immune imbalanced and prone to sickness," he adds.

Dr Buckley also explains that research from his lab has found increased alcohol intake was a predictive factor in this relationship, suggesting behaviours also contribute to crashing after big events.

Avoiding Leisure Sickness

1. Rev up the vitamins

Dr Buckley suggest taking Vitamin C (makes white cells more active and a [review of studies showed Vitamin C](#) halves common cold risk in people under heavy physical stress) In addition, Echinacea taken long term doesn't appear to be preventative of sickness but when taken early in symptom onset of cold or flu, appears to be associated with shorter symptom onset.

2. Chill out

Professor Vingerhoets believes Leisure Sickness is much more prevalent in people who are controlling and find it difficult to switch off and relax. "We have the impression it has to do with psychological make-up – especially people who are perfectionists". As a general strategy to be healthier and more relaxed practice activities that stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system like yoga, meditation, diaphragmatic breathing; or just get a few hobbies or interests outside of work.

3. Holiday countdown

I started doing this strategy with my clients a few years ago: rather than doing an all-nighter just before you take time out, plan what you need to do a week to 10 days before your well-earned break. This allows you to be more systematic, and a lot less frantic and stressed, in the lead up to time off.



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