

It's OK to Hate Summer

If you need help staying positive in the midst of heat waves and out-of-office disruptions, start with these tips.

By Elizabeth Passarella

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Last month, on the evening of the summer solstice, a friend said to me, “From now until winter, the days keep getting shorter.” She sighed. I was elated.

In my opinion, summer is more to be endured than enjoyed. “You can always put on more clothes — there is only so much you can politely take off,” I tell my husband as I curse the heat. My stress level rises with a lack of routine, which is intensified by having three children out of school.

Everyone else bonds over bemoaning winter, but what about us lonely few who think heirloom tomatoes are overrated?

“Not enjoying the summer feels less socially acceptable to say out loud,” said Milla Titova, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Arizona who studies happiness. She admitted that complaining about the heat is perfectly fine in Tucson, where she lives. “But I used to live in Seattle,” she added. “There was so much pressure to enjoy the two months of good weather.”

Summer Scrooges like me need to let go of that pressure to seize the season, experts told me. “Wish your friends well on their way to the beach and offer to meet them later for dinner,” said Dr. Samar McCutcheon, an associate professor of psychiatry at the Ohio State University.

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Think hygge, but for summer

Hygge, the Danish concept of comfort and conviviality (often translated as enjoying life’s small pleasures), is linked with winter. But you can embrace the idea for summer, too.

We light candles and cuddle under blankets “to balance out the cold of winter by raising your body temperature and easing physical tension,” said Emily Lindsay, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh whose research focuses on mindfulness. A cool shower or breezy, lightweight clothing can give you similar sensory relief in the heat, she said.

Dr. Lindsay also suggests that a cooling breath trick from yoga could be used in moments of feeling overheated and irritated. “Curl your tongue like a taco and inhale slowly. The breath will immediately feel cooler,” she said. “Exhale through your nose. It’s like breathing in cool air and exhaling hot air. It’s calming.”

“Hygge is also about being social,” Dr. Titova said. “Being in the right atmosphere with the right people contributes to our well-being.”

That could mean an air-conditioned movie or a museum visit with a friend, Dr. McCutcheon said. Instead of an outdoor picnic in the heat, maybe you could organize a nighttime swim.

Preserve small routines

Summer disruptions can be joyful: Your college kid is home. There are vacations. There are summer Fridays. But these breaks from normal can also be stressful, Dr. McCutcheon said, and maintaining some semblance of your daily routine can be

“protective,” she added.

Dr. McCutcheon recommended identifying two or three small things to maintain consistency throughout the summer, like signposts that keep your mind from feeling chaotic. “It might be having coffee in your favorite chair every morning or taking a walk at lunchtime,” she said.

Whatever habits are most beneficial, mentally or physically, should be a priority, no matter what else is off the rails, said Dr. Titova, who rises early in the summer to get in her run before it becomes too hot.

Practice gratitude, not guilt

Summer grumpiness is compounded by a feeling that you *should* be making the most of the season, as everyone else seems to be doing. But “you don’t need to feel guilty for not meeting societal expectations,” Dr. Lindsay said.

Practicing gratitude is like an antidote to reframe your circumstances, Dr. Titova said. You can meditate on positive experiences or write down three good things that happened at the end of the day, she said.

When you are in a situation that’s not ideal, it’s easy to get stuck on the unpleasantness. “Let the good and bad flow equally,” Dr. Lindsay said. “Then try to tune in to some aspect of joy.”

How’s this for tuning in to joy? My husband and I recently got a reservation at a restaurant that’s booked solid other months of the year. The subway was a furnace, but the food was heaven.

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