

## How to Keep Your Cool in the Summertime

For all the talk about summertime and the living being easy, it may not always be as easy as it seems. Along with longer daylight hours and warmer temperatures, summer can bring its own stress.

See if you can relate to any of these 10 summer stressors below. Just know that anticipating and planning for summertime's changes will go a long way towards making your summer the pleasurable experience you want it to be.

### Weather

Temperatures can flare along with the temperature. Heat can also bring on lethargy. It may be difficult to feel energized to get work done.

### More traffic

Longer daylight hours means more people out and going places. The streets and freeways can be crowded with tourists and travelers. Drivers may be irritable and quick-tempered. It can take longer to get anywhere.

### Kids home from school

If your children have summer off from school, you may face daycare situations or having the kids be home alone. Plus there are more activities, ballgames, swimming, camp—all that running around can cause more stress.

### Vacations

Much as vacations are stress reducers, they can be stress inducers, too. The planning and packing, the traveling itself, being away from home and out of familiar surroundings. Re-entry when you come home again can be overwhelming. Not to mention the cost of vacations. Whether you visit family or they visit you, stress is often packed in someone's suitcase.

### Changes at work

More people on vacation may mean more work for you. Or when you take vacation, there's work to do before you leave and more to catch up on when you return. Summertime can be the slow time for some businesses, so it can affect income. It can also mean more work for some seasonal businesses. Either way, stress can result.

### More home chores

Seems like the number of projects to do increases directly with the length of daylight hours. The garden just won't stop growing! All those weeds—and what do you do with all those tomatoes and squash?

### More activities to choose from

There are more leisure activities available in the summertime, more decisions to make, more money to spend and more planning to do—all this can cause stress. Strangely, more leisure time may mean you're busier than ever.

### More alcohol consumption

Outside and leisure activities mean more drinking—at ballgames, the beach, camping, outdoor concerts. Along with increased drinking may come increased drinking-and-driving, or you may experience bad behavior or noisy situations.

### Body image

Summertime means fewer clothes. Along with sleeveless dresses, shorts and bathing suits, summertime can bring up body issues.

### Food/diet

More leisure activities may mean junk food/fast food. Regular meals are interrupted. It may be too hot to cook. Diet can be affected by the season, and diet affects stress levels. \*

## 10 Stress Reducers

*Stress is an unwelcome guest any season of the year. But it's a guest we can ask to leave, just by the choices we make. Below are 10 of the very best ways to lower stress—and raise our joy in life.*

1. **Breathe** (deeply).
2. **Lighten up** (laugh, smile, be playful).
3. **Change** (locations or activities or people you're with).
4. **Physical activity** (exercise, walk, play a game, weed/garden).
5. **Diet** (watch sugar, caffeine, fatty foods, alcohol; don't over/under eat; drink water; eat fruit/veggies).
6. **Get it out** (talk to a friend, counselor; write it out).
7. **Have fun** (recreate: movie, games, museum, park, playground; do something creative).
8. **Relax** (in the tub, take a nap or a shower, sit in the sun/shade, do nothing).
9. **Massage** (backrub, footrub, stretch).
10. **Do something nice or kind for someone or the planet** (it doesn't have to be big; it can be anonymous).

**Bonus:** Immerse yourself in nature; connect to spirit; appreciate beauty. \*

# A Letter From

Bradley Brenner, PhD



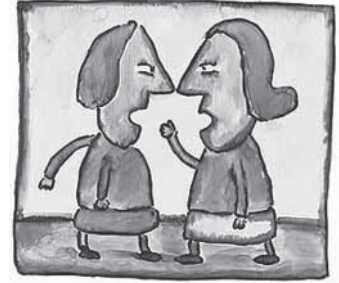
I suspect that when most people think of summer, seeking out therapy or career counseling isn't exactly the first thought that comes to mind. Most of us probably think about the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, vacations, and time in the sun. But I've noticed something interesting that often happens during the summer in my practice. It can be a highly productive time for people to address their concerns.

As it is addressed elsewhere in this issue of Thriving, summer can be an extraordinarily busy time for all of us. So, despite this busyness and the stress that comes with it, why is the summer sometimes a productive time for therapy? From my experience, it is likely due to the way that the summer allows our personal struggles to weigh less heavily on our minds. By shifting from the center of our attention to slightly off-center, we can sometimes find new pathways to understand ourselves, be nicer to ourselves, and change things about ourselves. This is something that is usually true year round. That is, the more we directly struggle and fight with our concerns, the more entangled and trapped we feel. Figuring out a way to take our concerns seriously, without being consumed by them, isn't easy to accomplish, but can have seriously good outcomes.

Contact me if you've got concerns weighing heavily on your mind, and would like to talk further about them. I'm here to help address your concerns about work and life.

## How Well Do You Handle Conflict?

It's a fact of life in our world today—conflict, like taxes, is inevitable. This isn't all bad. Naturally, people are going to have differing points of view. Sometimes conflict, and the resolution that comes from it, can result in a closer bond between two people or more complete understanding of a situation by a group.



Conflict may arise over small issues or major problems. And sometimes, because of the way individuals handle conflict, those small issues are transformed into Major Problems.

The bullies of the world seem to enjoy conflict, coming at it headlong. They're aggressive on the freeway, surly to service people and argumentative with co-workers. Other people avoid conflict at all costs, never speaking up for themselves, always backing down. They are the doormat everyone walks upon. Take a look at the following questions to find out how you respond in conflict situations.

### True False

- 1. When confronted by an angry or hostile person, I take a moment and consider my response, rather than react in kind or defensively.
- 2. I try to see my part in the situation and am willing to take responsibility for it instead of blaming others or denying any responsibility.
- 3. During a conflict, I stay with the issue at hand rather than bringing up the past or changing the subject.
- 4. I'm open to exploring different options for resolution instead of insisting on having my way. I listen to what others say with an open mind.
- 5. I pay attention to what's being said behind the words spoken, which might have nothing to do with the issue at hand. I ask for clarification when I don't understand something.
- 6. I establish boundaries during conflicts and don't allow anyone to verbally or physically abuse me.
- 7. When a resolution can't be reached by those involved, and "agreeing to disagree" isn't an acceptable solution, I'm willing to consult with a neutral person to help resolve the situation.
- 8. When conflict occurs, I clam up and become non-communicative, quiet and passive, hoping it will dissipate.
- 9. When confronted, I try to divert the disagreement and focus it on what the other person did wrong.
- 10. I tend to go "out of my body" during conflicts. I can't think straight, I'm spacey, and I get afraid of the intense emotion.
- 11. Whenever conflict arises, I get sick. The bigger the conflict, the more drastic my symptoms become.
- 12. I try to avoid conflict by saying there's no problem or that nothing's wrong, when asked. I downplay even small problems.

Your approach to conflict resolution can make life easier or tougher for you. If you answered "true" more often in questions 8–12 and "false" more often in questions 1–7—and you would like to explore other ways to handle conflict in your life and relationships—please don't hesitate to call. ✨

## Summertime Drinking—When Is It a Problem?

What do you get more of in the summertime than any other time of the year? Besides mosquitoes and sunburn. If you guessed more drinking, you're right. Except for the winter holidays, no other time of the year sees an increase in drinking as much as summertime. There are more leisure-time activities—ballgames, outings to the beach or lake or river. More barbecues, picnics and other social gatherings where alcohol is as common as hot dogs on the grill. And for some, there's nothing like a cold beer after a wrestling match with a feisty weed whacker.

Just like the temperature, drinking taboos are lifted a few degrees in the summer. Drinking in the daytime seems to be more acceptable. You might lounge around the pool drinking tall, cool ones, or attend patio parties featuring exotic drinks and tiki torches. And since it stays lighter later, the cocktail hour is extended a few hours.

Vacations can also mean more drinking: no job to get to first thing in the morning; a relaxing time and place where you can loosen up, have some fun.

So, it's often during the summer that drinking problems may arise.

It's not true that increased drinking causes alcoholism—alcoholism is a disease with many "causes." Just because someone drinks more frequently, or consumes



more alcohol than they used to, doesn't mean he or she has become an alcoholic. But, there are warning signs that drinking may be a problem, for example:

- Starting to drink earlier in the day.
- Increased drinking (drinking every day or every few days, and drinking increased quantities).
- Continuing to drink when you've "had enough."
- Denying you've "had enough."
- Urging others to "have one more," when they've said no thanks.
- Including alcohol in every activity.
- Always making sure there's "enough" alcohol (buying excess liquor for gatherings).
- Refusing to talk to others who voice concerns.

Alcoholism is a family disease—it affects not just the person who drinks, but everyone else in the family. They may need help as much as the alcoholic to recover.

The most common symptom of alcoholism is denial that there's a problem; the first step in recovery, is to admit there might be a problem. If you're concerned about your drinking, or the drinking of someone you love, let's talk. \*

## Doing the Right Thing—Issues in Integrity

Integrity is at the very basis of self-esteem. It comes from the word *integer*, and carries the same sense of wholeness: a person of integrity is a whole person. To have integrity implies a person has given thoughtful consideration to what is right and wrong, then lives by those principles. When a behavior contradicts deeply held beliefs, it eats away at self-esteem.

*Daniel, age 43, found a UPS package on his porch when he returned from work. Though the package wasn't addressed to him, he opened it and found in it a cool four-in-one tool he'd been wanting. The package had been shipped pre-paid, which meant the person who ordered it had already paid for it. Instead of returning the package to UPS, Daniel added the tool to his collection in the garage and used it for a while. But it seemed every job for which he used that particular tool either took an extraordinary amount of time or didn't work out right. Daniel finally gave the tool away to a friend.*

Those who act in ways that contradict what they believe is "the right thing," may be able to justify their actions for a while, but this self-betrayal ultimately

catches up with them. In their own eyes, they begin to see themselves as hypocritical and dishonest. This self-judgment is far more powerful than any outside criticism or rebuke.

*Sarah, age 37, was invited to a formal dinner by an important client. She went shopping for a new evening gown and put it on her credit card. She looked gorgeous that night and she and her client had a terrific time. As soon as the store opened the next morning, there was Sarah, dress folded neatly back in the box. She told the sales clerk that the dress "just wasn't right" and got the charge credited back to her account. Over the next few months, Sarah's relationship with her client deteriorated until, ultimately, she lost the account.*

Having integrity means knowing your principles and living by them, even when it isn't the easiest thing to do. Especially when it isn't the easiest thing to do. Keeping your word, telling the truth, speaking out, taking a stand, having the courage of your convictions: this is the stuff of integrity. It's a primary ingredient of self-esteem, and at the foundation of good mental health. \*

# Summer Vacations & Families

## What to Do With All That Togetherness

Summer vacations with the family can be the best of times or the worst of times. Interminable plane trips, boring hotel rooms, exhausting hours together in the car, funky cabins on muddy lakes and six straight days of rain—family vacations can be difficult enough for adults, but for children they can be downright awful!



On the other hand, exploring new places together, sharing time and goofing off for days at a stretch, meeting new people or reuniting with loving relatives—family vacations can be the best thing since summer was invented.

How to have more of the best of times and less of the worst?

First of all, watch out for great expectations. Your own and the kids'. Enjoy the surprise of the vacation as it unfolds. This doesn't mean

don't make plans. By all means, do make plans. And include everyone in the planning.

Maps, brochures, photographs, letters, share them all. Make checklists, too, with responsibilities for everyone.

Allow plenty of time, don't jam-pack

days or crowd too much into the trip. If you're traveling with young children or toddlers, take short jumps instead of long leaps. If you're driving, stop often, get out and stretch, move around.

Consider picnics instead of restaurant meals.

Keep it simple. Don't schedule so many activities that there's no time for just hanging out. Build in rest time, too. Tempers have a tendency

to flare when everyone's packed together day and night for long stretches of time. Create alone time, for you and the children. Everyone needs recharging. Remember, both boredom and over-stimulation can result in acting out. Strive for balance.

Be sure to allow a day or two for re-entry before you go back to work and the children return to their summer routine. Coming home can be as stressful as leaving. Make

homecoming part of the vacation, too.

Vacationing together provides that one element for nurturing family relations that is far too often missing

in our day-in and day-out lives—time. May your family vacation be one of the best of times. \*



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*Recognize that there is more to life? Are your relationships causing stress instead of acting like refuge from the world? Does your job leave you exhausted and depleted? I work to help people realize their potential in relationships and at work.*