

## Keeping the Glow

September. Depending on our age or stage of life this month can mean many different things. For some of us it means getting back to normal after summer holidays. For others it can mean the start of a new term, school or college. For most of us though September marks the change of season, not just in nature but in our activities and expectations.

Although not everyone has July and August as a time outside and in the sunshine (least of all those in the southern hemisphere!) we all benefit from time away from the routine that holidays bring.

This is the time when we can let the inside and the outside of our homes meet. We can fling wide the doors and windows and let in air and light. Our living space can extend into our own or shared gardens or balconies. As a result we can feel more in tune with the natural world, whether it's a positive such as staying up late to look at the stars or a negative, being pestered by wasps or mosquitoes. Either way we are closer to nature than with the doors and windows fastened.

In the same way summer is most often the time for *al fresco* meals whether it is a picnic in the park or breakfast on the patio. Families with young children will know the joy of meals where little ones can have a bit of space and any spills are on the grass not the carpet. It can also be the time when we join with other families and have more *ad hoc* arrangements – “you bring the bread, I'll bring the salad.”

Routines and patterns are vital for a secure and stable home but just tweaking them a little on holiday can refresh us and our patterns at the same time. Spending time reading, playing music, going for a walk or cycle ride does not feel like “wasting time” on holiday it feels like “making the most of the time.” It is no surprise that we often look and feel our best when we are relaxed and refreshed.

Another gift of summer can be simpler choices. When we are away from home we can only wear the clothes, read the books, play the games we packed. Whereas at home we might find ourselves in different rooms with different agendas, on holiday the expectation is for family time together. When the choices are simpler we have more time to be rather than do.

Given all the above it is no surprise that some people report “post-holiday blues” when they come back down to land in back in the world of the school run, laundry and rainy days. How can we keep some of the benefits of summer into the autumn? How can we keep the glow?

As with most intentions the best advice is to “Keep it simple”. Just maintaining one of the activities or attitudes of holiday time into “real time” can bring health and happiness dividends.

Perhaps it will be making time for a walk every day. It need not be very far or very exotic. Just walking down a different street on the way back from work or school can break the pattern and show us new things.

Many of us relish the time to read that being on holiday can bring. Listening to audio books is great but there is something about sitting down with a book that is hard to replicate. Why not try having a book break every day? Choose a book with short chapters and have a 10 minute “power read” while having a coffee. Or, if you have a battered paperback version of a longer book then do the unthinkable and pull out a chapter at a time to go in your bag and keep you company.

Noticing the day. One of the problems of a busy routine is that the days can tend to merge into each other. Try the doorstep test to help you notice what today is like. As you leave the house STOP - on the doorstep or wherever is just outdoors – and take a moment to register the weather, the colour of the sky, the sounds you can hear, what you can see. Just feeling the sun or rain or wind or snow on your face for a few seconds helps make the day its own. If this sounds odd, just give it a try: weather when it’s not a problem to overcome is a great way to keep in touch with nature.

If more relaxed family time is one of the things you cherish from holiday times, then give some thought to how a glimpse of this might be possible to maintain. Family Film Night once a month might be a time when everyone gathers in one room –without other screens – to watch something you can all enjoy. It is less hassle and less expensive than a trip to the cinema and little ones can nod off more easily.

Having said that, setting time aside is one of the real challenges of modern family life. It can often become the cause of tension when one member of the family or another is distracted by other commitments. Much better to catch the moments you are all together and make the most of them. “We are all here for supper – let’s share the best thing that happened to us today.”

Keeping the physical summer glow can also be tricky as the weather gets colder and we find ourselves back in cars, trains or buses. Be a sun-seeker and as soon as there is even a glimpse of sunshine see if you can move your chair at home or at work to catch a few rays. (Worth remembering that even weaker sunlight can still affect your skin – but putting sun lotion on your face is another way of capturing the feel and smell of summer!)

Think about investing in a “Daylight” lamp. These come in all shapes and sizes and the specially designed cool bulbs give the beneficial effects of natural light on dark days. In consultation with your doctor the whole family having a low dose of Vitamin D can also help our physical well-being as the nights draw in.

The best way of all to keep the glow is to start looking for it in all this new season offers. Looking forward is one of the most attractive attitudes in family life. So make a list – real one that hangs in the kitchen, or one in your head – of the delights of the months ahead. The first hot chocolate, roast chestnuts or pumpkin soup are high on the list of autumn comforts. As far as activities go then make sure this year you get to walk in the woods as the colours of the leaves change from green to gold. Make sure that you plant some bulbs too so that –indoors – you’ll have flowers for Christmas, and – outdoors – green shoots for New Year.

Hope that this new season brings great joy to you and your families and that even when the suntan fades the "glow" remains.