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What Did You Do For Fun Today?

A simple question that has a lot of people scratching their heads

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by [Amy Rothenberg ND](#), Naturopathic Physician, writer, teacher & advocate for healthy living

I was treating a patient recently who shared with me a host of complaints: digestive issues, sleep problems and pretty severe acne. She wanted a naturopathic perspective on finding balance and getting healthier. I listened carefully to her medical history, performed a physical exam and was trying to get a sense of how I could best help her with regard to diet, an exercise plan, specific supplements and angles on stress reduction. I asked, *by the way, what do you do for fun?*

She stared at me & her eyes got wider and wider and she burst into tears.

We never know when a simple question might hit a nerve.

Increasingly when I ask that question, I either get a blank stare or reactions like above. The sheer proximity and 24/7 access to work, the relentless virtual connectedness has many people having way less fun. It's so satisfying to work, to get the job done, but it often leaves people in a vicious cycle that does not leave enough space for healthy living in general, like getting regular exercise or preparing healthy food, let alone carving out a little time for fun.

Some of my patients cannot remember the last time they had any fun. Some cannot recall what they *ever* used to do for fun.

Workaholism is the last remaining *ism* that people get a lot of kudos for. *Wow you get a lot done, or I really admire how productive you are! Or man! I wish I had your work ethic!* The realization that one has become a workaholic can hit hard. [Here's](#) a well-researched piece on workaholism if you want to read more. Workaholism has many faces, but similar impact to overall health. Alas, all work and no play does not make people very happy. And in the end, it's not good for health either.

So I set aside a little time to help my patients brainstorm ideas. I might share this [piece](#) which is a terrific read on why fun and play are as important for adults as they are for children.

My patient above recounted that the last time she had any fun was years ago when she was playing volleyball competitively in college. I mentioned that she could likely find a pick up game in her community to try. Or maybe she would like another lower key sport game played with others. As patients get healthier in general, there is often more self agency to try something new, to push through hesitation and in the end, find activities that will bump up the fun factor which in turn bumps up health.

I remind my patients that they will be more productive when they integrate a little fun in their lives. And, I know that having fun, playing games, making music, dancing, doing art, spending time in nature, enjoying down time, connecting with family and friends, and feeling connected all impact health. The world of [psychoneuroimmunology](#) has elucidated the fact that the mind impacts the nervous system & the nervous system influences the immune system and so the cycle goes.

So, as a naturopathic physician, I often I find myself including in my patient's list of recommendations: #1 assignment, have more fun!

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Dr. Amy Rothenberg was named 2017 Physician of the Year by the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. Her book, *The A Cappella Singer Who Lost Voice & Other Stories from Natural Medicine*, shares from her 30+ years of clinical experience illustrated by patient stories. Dr. Rothenberg writes and lectures widely on topics in natural medicine, helping audiences understand the essential philosophical and practical approaches used in naturopathic and integrative care. Dr. Rothenberg has been a leader and advocate for the licensure of naturopathic medicine and for access to natural medicine for all.

When not busy in the world of natural medicine, Dr. Rothenberg can be found in her art studio, putting in the garden or on the ballroom dance floor!