

Healthy Investments: Leisure is good for your health



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Do you spend your week hyper-caffeinated, speeding in your car from one mind-numbing activity to the next? Do most days end with you slumped in front of the television or computer?

You may not be surprised to hear that this describes a majority of Americans. The average American worker logs more hours per year than any other worker in the world, and we have the gross domestic product to show for it. However, according to data from the World Bank, we also spend 18 percent of that productivity annually on healthcare.

Ignoring the pursuit of leisure at our own peril, America has become a nation of spectators. Many readers may balk at the notion of a health column discussing the importance of leisure, yet it is hard to understate how important proper, active leisure is to wellness.

The leisure that most of us choose after work involves television more than any

other category — and this applies across generations. The Bureau of Labor Statistics found in a 2012 survey of over 12,000 Americans that we spend an average of 2.8 hours watching television every day.

Yet, rather than dish out a lecture on American obesity with a generous helping of finger-wagging, it may be better to emphasize what we are missing out on. Research from Harvard Medical School has continued to highlight the important brain and body benefits of all kinds of active leisure activities. Whether it's walking, playing fetch with the dog, gardening, biking, playing music or cooking, investing a great deal of time in something that is an end only to itself has tremendous rewards for health — especially if it mitigates the costs of chronic illness like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Learning a new skill can be especially important for keeping the brain sharp.

Aristotle famously said, “the end of labor is to gain leisure.” With long days, and glorious weather ahead, how will you spend your hard-earned leisure time?