

BE WELL

Find Ways to Experience “Type I Fun”/Healthy Summer Activities to Lower Stress

Now that the summer of 2023 is well upon us, it's good to look for ways to incorporate mindfulness into your summer adventures. This means choosing to put your attention on a specific activity, in the present moment, without judgment. Many times, we do things that our culture or society tells us are “healthy” and will bring well-being into our lives. However, often these activities may not truly be beneficial to us, especially in challenging weather like heat and humidity, or dense smog. These exact weather conditions have prevailed during much of our Vermont summer due to the hundreds of forest fires currently burning in Quebec with the El Niño bringing the smoke into Vermont and the surrounding Northeast. For example, I went running in high pollen counts with temperatures higher than 75 degrees with 90 percent humidity and this caused my first anaphylactic reaction this summer, where my throat closed, and I had to be rushed to the emergency room for steroids and epinephrine to survive! My body literally rejected this “healthy” activity.

Now, that may be an extreme example of a “healthy” activity actually becoming dangerous, almost deadly, but the same considerations apply even when the weather conditions are fabulous. For example, you might go running on a perfect day, but you feel miserable and hate every step until you are done, or you might go for a bike ride when the weather is pleasant but experience such bad neck or back pain that you pray for the experience to end. When these unpleasant conditions occur, your nervous system sends a stressed signal to

the rest of your body, flooding your system with the stress hormones adrenaline, epinephrine and in the longer term, cortisol. These stress hormones slow down digestion and metabolism, which means if you are using these exercises to lose weight, they are actually having the opposite effect. You can gain weight by being stressed out doing exercise that stresses you out or that you do not enjoy.

So, my guidance is simple, apply the three types of the “Fun Scale” to your summer activities and adventures, because not all fun and healthy activities are created equal. Type I **Fun is enjoyable WHILE it is happening.** Also, known as, simply, “fun.” Type II Fun is miserable or extremely challenging while it is occurring, but **fun in RETROSPECT.** This sort usually begins with the best intentions, and then things go awry. The activity is so hard you can't believe you did it, like many of my days backpacking on the Long Trail. Type II Fun isn't fun while you're doing it, but you wake up the next morning excited to do it again and again and again! Type III Fun is **NOT FUN AT ALL.** Not even in retrospect. Afterwards, you can't even find a reason why did it in the first place. Now, the categories into which your types of fun fall is highly subjective and subject to shifting from one level to another, especially when you realize you gained valuable insights and lessons from a Type III fun event, so it then is altered to a Type II Fun. As many outdoor enthusiasts exclaim, it doesn't have to be “fun” to be fun.

When you apply the Fun Scale to your healthy activities in a mindful way, try to

stay in the Type I categories, to lower the levels of stress hormones that are generated. Because a Type II fun will absolutely generate stress during and after the activity, even if you feel such a sense of accomplishment you want to do it again. Sometimes, just the awareness that you will feel amazing when the activity is completed can take Type II fun and make it less stress-inducing. But that takes time and experience: a training of your body and mind to do the hard thing, but still feel a level of current and future enjoyment in it.

Thus, as stressed lawyers, join me in Type I Fun and healthy activities this summer amidst a challenging professional climate that we cannot always control. What we can control is the activities we choose to do that will directly benefit our nervous systems to stay in the happy hormone places. And if the weather is not favorable for the activity you are planning, or you know it will dramatically increase, not decrease, your stress levels, don't do it. It will not have as much of a positive impact and your body may even reject it, like mine does!

Stay happy and healthy this 2023 summer and join me the VBA Annual Meeting in Burlington on September 29 for an experiential Wellness CLE and at the regularly scheduled mindfulness webinar CLEs and presentations at various legal events and conferences with the Vermont Bar Association. If you are ready to improve your overall wellbeing and need someone to help support you, please contact me at thehappyhumanprojects@yahoo.com to discuss opportunities to incorporate mindfulness and wellness into your stressful lives as attorneys through private group workshops, courses or 1:1 coaching.

Samara D. Anderson, Esq. is a Technical Regulatory Compliance Advisor for the Department of Children and Families, a Registered 200-hour Yoga Medicine™ Yoga Teacher (completing her 500-hour certification), a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Teacher-in-Training, and a social entrepreneur teaching mindfulness to stressed professionals while creating a non-profit community farm in Vermont to use therapeutic animals, nature, and mindfulness to heal people. She also Chairs the VBA Lawyer Well-Being Section.



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