



Wellness Tourism

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Wellness tourism is travel for promoting health and well-being. You can focus on physical, psychological or spiritual activities involving nutrition, fitness, stress reduction, spiritual awakening, or a combination of these. The goal of wellness tourism is to turn travel into an opportunity to holistically improve or maintain health.

How does it differ from medical tourism? Medical tourism involves travel to receive medical treatment in a different country or state. For example, surgery or dental care may be scheduled somewhere else because it is less expensive, better quality or unavailable at home. In contrast, wellness tourism consists of trips centered on health and wellness, disease prevention, healthy lifestyle choices and ways to enhance our well-being.

Wellness tourism had gross revenues reaching \$720 billion in 2019. Driving this trend is an epidemic of chronic disease and many Americans' desire for better health. The Global Wellness Institute says wellness travelers consist of two main groups: ❶ those whose main motivation for picking a destination is wellness and ❷ travelers who participate in wellness activities to maintain their health while taking business or leisure trips. The Institute ranks the U.S. as the top wellness economy in the world and No. 1 in almost every category of access to wellness activities.

Any type of travel has risks, such as weather, sanitation, foodborne illness and infectious disease. Consult with a health care provider about vaccines, food and water sources and other recommendations, especially before traveling outside the U.S. Also ask your host destination what steps they take to reduce the environmental impact and habitat destruction of the programs they offer.

MILK: Not Just From Cows

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Americans have been gradually passing up cow milk in favor of plant-based milk alternatives. In 2023, non-dairy milks accounted for \$3.6 billion in the U.S., with almond milk being the most popular.

There are many reasons why you might prefer non-dairy milk. You may opt for dairy-free beverages if you have lactose intolerance (though you can get lactose-free cow's milk), or a milk allergy, follow a vegan diet or want to avoid products made from cows given antibiotics and hormones.

Here's what to know when you peruse the dairy aisle:

The key to choosing a good milk alternative is an option that is high in protein and low in sugar. Cow's milk has 8 grams of protein per cup, but some plant-based milks have just 1 gram of protein. Soy milk is the only alternative naturally high in protein — with about 8 grams per cup, it's just like cow's milk (almond and hemp milk have less than 1 gram). Some oat and almond milks are now enriched with pea protein to bump up the total protein content.

Check for added sugars. Many plant-based milks have added sugars, especially if they are vanilla- or chocolate-flavored. Choose unsweetened beverages more often.

Keep in mind that while dairy products are naturally rich in calcium, alternative milks must be enriched with calcium to meet the levels in cow's milk. Choose an alternative that is fortified with calcium and other nutrients, such as vitamin D and B₁₂. You may notice that your beverage carton has instructions to "shake well before serving." This is an important step, since the fortified vitamins and minerals tend to sink to the bottom of the container. Shake it up to ensure you get more nutrients in every cup.

What about allergies? If you have nut allergies, avoid beverages made from nuts, such as almond, cashew, hazelnut and macadamia. Pass on soy- and flax-based milks if you're allergic to either.



Getting Past Burnout

By Eric Endlich, PhD



Prolonged stress can lead to burnout, a state of physical and emotional exhaustion. When demands are too great, you may lose interest and motivation. It's important to address this condition before it leads to health problems.

Some signs of burnout are:

- Impatience or irritability.
- Headaches, stomachaches or other pain with no known cause.
- Sleep changes.
- Difficulty focusing.
- Lack of satisfaction from usual activities.
- Feeling unappreciated or trapped.
- Coping through alcohol, drugs or food.
- A generally negative attitude.

Keys to managing burnout include:

- **Identifying** the signs early. Know when you're reaching your limit.
- **Finding** a good listener. Whether via a loved one or support group, feeling heard can be very comforting.
- **Avoiding** excessive negativity. Read positive news stories and seek out upbeat people.
- **Maintaining** perspective. There's more to life than your stress triggers.
- **Taking** breaks. Step away from energy-sappers so you can recharge.
- **Engaging** in meaningful activities. What makes you feel fulfilled?
- **Considering** your options. Can you decline or delegate some tasks?
- **Relaxing.** Try yoga, a nature walk or soothing music.
- **Sleeping.** This is essential.
- **Exercising.** When your energy is low, this can be challenging but also rejuvenating.
- **Developing** a long-term plan. Select your top priorities, and keep them front and center.

Q: PTSD and COVID-19 connection?

A: The COVID-19 pandemic has not only worsened the physical health of countless individuals, but has also impacted mental health conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can occur after a dangerous or frightening experience, leading to symptoms including:

- Flashbacks or nightmares of the traumatic event.
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma.
- Mood disturbance.
- Wariness or difficulty sleeping.

COVID-19 may cause or worsen PTSD because of:

- Feeling unsafe. The potential threat of infection often raises anxiety levels.
- Breathing restrictions. The sensation of breathing through a mask, or difficulty breathing during a COVID infection, can trigger anxiety or trauma memories.
- Reduced coping strategies. Social distancing and reduced social contact may limit key sources of comfort for some people.

Post-traumatic symptoms often resolve on their own in many cases. However, if you believe you have PTSD and are not improving, consider seeking help from your health care provider or a mental health professional.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



Pleasures of Pickleball

It's a sport with a funny name, but pickleball is no joke. Pickleball is the nation's fastest-growing sport and no wonder. It's easy to learn and great exercise for body and mind at any age and skill level.

So what is pickleball? You serve a soft, light plastic ball underhand with a solid paddle over a net to your opponent. Unlike tennis and other racket sports, this aerobic exercise has a shorter learning curve. It's great for building lower and upper body muscles, as well as those in the core.

And with outdoor and indoor pickleball courts available nationwide, it's easy to find a place to play, whether it's a fitness facility or a public park. Pickleball courts are 44 by 20 feet, making them smaller than tennis courts. The smaller court makes it easier to keep the ball in play longer than in tennis. The game is played to 11 points, and two to four steps are enough to get a point. While pickleball is a slower sport than tennis, it packs plenty of heart-pumping activity. It improves hand and eye coordination, too.

Pickleball is a lower-impact sport, which means less stress on your ankles, hips and knees. If you have a joint condition, such as arthritis, ask your health care provider about pickleball. To reduce risk of injury, always warm up — a five-minute walk is good — followed by stretching before you hit the court. Stretch after playing while your muscles are still warm.

Did you know? Pickleball was invented on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle, in 1965. The name comes from rowing, in which the slowest boat is the pickle boat.



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Get in the Swim**, is at personalbest.com/extras/24V6tools.

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