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Playing for Fun


 By [Trish Henry](#), editor, Internal Thrive | March 2, 2011

Remember going to a new playground as a kid? You'd meet other kids and within five minutes everyone would be running around new best friends. The great thing about play as an adult is that we can practice new behaviors without the risk of failure.

Do You Want To Play?

Remember what it was like as a kid going to a new playground? You'd meet some other kids and within five minutes everyone would be running around playing tag, becoming new best friends. The easy give-and-take, negotiating rules for the game, the instant friendships and the exhilaration and joy of play all make up some great memories of childhood.

As we get older and inevitably take on more responsibilities, playtime often recedes into memory. Our work/life balance may skew heavily towards work as we struggle to support our families and develop our careers. Yet what we gained through play as children has lasted and helped us throughout our lives. Could continued play help us as adults as well?

Benefits of Play

The great thing about play as adults is that we can practice new behaviors without the same risk of failure that we may feel at work. Who cares if the [water bottle rocket](#) didn't work quite right first time around? Its very failure encourages us to figure out what went wrong and try something different to see if we can do better. Plus rockets are fun! Or figuring out that flip video camera at home with your buddies and making a fun YouTube video can help you gain confidence and spur ideas (such as a 30 second video) when you need something extra for a work PowerPoint presentation.



Here are just a few benefits of play:

- Creativity and problem solving**
 Inventing, building things, exploring, making up games, figuring out how to work with others, all these activities work to expand our ideas of what is possible. Want to learn to "think outside the box?" Play can help you develop the mental skills that can make this possible.
- Concentration and focus**
 Play, especially outdoor play, increases our ability to focus and concentrate. In part just getting away from our desks or couches and being in completely different surroundings allows us to change mental gears. The physicality of [walking](#), team sports, yoga, meditation all can help give our minds a quick "vacation" so that when we return to work, we can be more effective.
- Confidence and leadership skills**
 By taking risks and "practicing" new behaviors and stretching ourselves during play, we can gain confidence that carries over to other aspects of our lives.
- Relaxation**
 When was the last time you [flew a kite](#)? Play can allow us to let go of our everyday worries for a short period of time and focus totally on something good. This break can help relieve levels of stress and anxiety. High levels of constant [stress](#) can lead to general exhaustion and even depression. By taking relaxation breaks, you can allow your body and mind to recover and get off of the stress "fight or flight" roller coaster.
- Physical health**
 Whether we garden, [walk around our neighborhoods](#), play soccer, are on a [dragon boat team](#), or even go to museums, this physical part of play can help not only our mental health, but our physical health as well. Our blood pressure and weight can go down and our physical fitness and health can go up.
- Laughter and feelings of joy**
 My coworkers and I joke around and laugh a lot we like to play. It makes our day go quickly and helps us work better as a team. What's going on? Laughter reduces the level of stress hormones and increases endorphins. It

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increases the number of antibody-producing cells and raises the effectiveness of T-cells. Laughing provides a physical and emotional release to stress, anger, and sadness. It can help make difficult situations seem not so hard, and it can be a gift to the people you care about.

So take some time out of your day to play. Play with your kids, with your pets, with your spouse. Call up your brother or sister or friend and share a joke. It will make your life better



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