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## Avoiding stress during holidays

By Carrole Spiers, Special to Gulf News  
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Workplace stress is usually about mounting pressure around the office, and the all-too familiar effects of tension, aggression, overwork and, sometimes, burnout.

However, it's not usually connected with holidays - or is it? Your holidays are closely intertwined with your everyday work and their success will have much to do with how well you are able to manage your stress. In this age of short deadlines and long hours, you need to compensate with frequent breaks as an essential recharging device, and when you do, it's especially important to switch off and not be tempted to check your e-mail every hour! Your mind must also be out of the office, as well as your body.

Then, of course, there is the larger matter of your annual leave. Here again you face the pressures of business life when your absence from the office is viewed as an obstacle to team performance. You are haunted by the thought of those important meetings going ahead without your (vital) input. There is also the apparent impracticability of scheduling a clear fortnight. There are some employers who like to make the subtle suggestion that you are somehow deserting your post, and ought to put in some longer hours to compensate - a piece of moral blackmail that causes needless stress, and should be rejected outright.

When you eventually do manage to get away - you are promptly reminded that holidays can often set up more stress, not less. Arriving at your hotel after various traffic delays, you have to acclimatise to different food and a changed pace of life, perhaps in another time-zone, and it's usually about three days before your system will fully adapt. Very often, you will instinctively find yourself watching the business news on the TV or frantically trying to find a newspaper and checking the e-mails and texts on your mobile. All this is the opposite of stress management - rather it's stress mismanagement.

Then at the other end of your break, there is the reverse-acclimatisation effect, when you are back at your desk but your mind is still on the beach, unable to properly focus for the first few days on complex problems. A good rule-of-thumb for tackling holiday stress is to treat the annual holiday for what it ought to be - a completely different experience from the rest of the year. If your normal life consists of continual, urgent deadlines and targets, then 'chill-out' completely whilst you are away. Don't

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plan schedules and extra tours and time-sensitive things to do and see that will put you and your partner under pressure.

One good tip is simply not to expect everything on your holiday to be 100 per cent - so that when the plane is late or the waiter spills soup on your clothes - you are able to smile and be philosophical. Remember, nothing is perfect in this world, not even a diamond!

#### Key points for that real break

- Holidays can be stressful so be prepared to 'go with the flow'.
- Treat your annual break as a different experience from normal life.
- Don't expect perfection - nature doesn't...

- The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years' experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

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