



PHOTOGRAPHED BY KARIN KATT. TEXT BY NAOMI CHRISOLAKIS. "AMPNATSEMI INCOME AND WEALTH REPORT ISSUE 22: 'SHE WORKS HARD FOR THE MONEY'". APRIL 2009.

RECLAIM THE WEEKEND

Spent by Sunday night, wishing there was one more day to get everything done? Here's how to take back your time off and really relax

Take a look at the average woman's weekend agenda and the chances are you'll be exhausted by the laundry list of activities consuming our time off (and then there's the actual laundry). When your weekend is stuffed full with spin class, brunch, groceries, catching up on emails, family commitments and squeezing in a dinner date, it can feel like we're running our lives like a seven-day working week.

"Weekends are getting busier and busier," comments Melbourne-based life coach Alex Kingsmill (www.upstairs.net.au). "As work grows more demanding, we have less time during the week to see friends and family, to do chores, to exercise, to go out, to have fun and to just do nothing. So we crowd all this activity into a couple of days."

A 2013 Oxford University study found that women are up to 40 per cent more likely to suffer from mental health problems than men – and the number one culprit is stress from juggling the demands of many roles.

"When your mind is being pulled in so many different directions, you're never really enjoying anything and your mind is never 'stilled'," reveals psychologist and life coach Lisa Kaplin (www.smartwomeninspiredlives.com). This lack of stillness, she adds, prevents us from unwinding.

THE CULT OF "SHOULD"

We're not saying goodbye to lazy Sundays just because we're slaves to our smartphones or wired to juggle more than one thing at a time, though – it's also our sense of "should" that's eating away at our weekends.

"We live in this 'I should be perfect' world: I should exercise seven days a week; I should have a more exciting social life; I should work harder," observes Kaplin. "If that's what we're doing, the weekends become less about

relaxing and more about 'should-ing' all over ourselves." And it's not just the pressure we put on ourselves – so much of the weekend is about other people, from drinks with the friend you've been meaning to see for a month to Sunday lunch at the in-laws'.

"Women feel a huge amount of pressure to please others and to do everything brilliantly, so they keep saying 'yes' to the demands of others and they keep asking more of themselves," explains Kingsmill. The problem? "We're all rushing around doing a whole lot of stuff that doesn't really matter in order to send the message to ourselves and to other people that we're high functioning, that things are going well. But in fact, all the busyness is detracting from our wellbeing. We get to the point where we're incredibly unhappy but too busy and exhausted to recognise, acknowledge or fix the problem."

FIND YOUR BLISS

Whether it's the dread of an overcommitted weekend, the stress of trying to get everything done, or the inevitable exhaustion once it's all done, unhappiness occurs because we've lost touch with what really makes us feel fulfilled, according to Kaplin.

"I ask clients who have a full life but are miserable, what is it that they love to do? I'm shocked by how many of them say, 'I don't remember' – so I'll ask them to look back at their childhood and think about what their favourite thing was back in the day."

Be it reading, drawing, cycling, cooking or dancing, that's what you need to do to make sure you have a big dose of joy during the weekend, believes Kaplin. And the other stuff? "Ask yourself, is it enjoyable, or does it bring you good energy? If not, you should pull one or two

things out or do them less frequently, perhaps one weekend a month."

CUT THE CHAOS

Sounds lovely – but what about the laundry? Free yourself by outsourcing some of those chores, and don't feel bad: it's less about taking shortcuts and more about buying back your time – and we're talking hours worth. Groceries? Organise for delivery (we love www.aussiefarmers.com.au for quality Australian food) so you can spend less time at the supermarket and more with your friends. Cleaning or handyman jobs? Visit www.oneflare.com for quotes from local businesses and let them take over. As for those little tasks that always end up taking over the whole weekend, give www.airtasker.com a go – from assembling that IKEA shelf to picking up the dry-cleaning, the site will match you with "runners" who'll do the job for you.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

As for the friend who's clamouring for a catch-up and the boss who wants a project done by Monday, it's time to set boundaries. "Be clear within yourself what you are willing to do and what you're not, be consistent so people know what they can and can't ask of you, and practise saying no in a way that will actually work for you when you're in the moment," says Kingsmill. "Something like, 'That sounds terrific, let me check my diary and get back to you,' gives you time to think about what you really want to do and reply in a way that feels comfortable." And nix the guilt, adds Kaplin. "If you say no and then feel guilty, you've ruined the concept. What others expect of us is their problem; all we can do is be very clear in our communications."

Full-time working women with children spend **15 hours** per week doing the cooking and cleaning compared with only **six hours** per week for men.*