

20 October 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Here we are at the end of a busy half term, with lots of achievements already behind us but also very ready for our holidays. The last six weeks have rocketed by, reminding us of all the intensity of school life at Northampton High. Our school has been buzzing with super-curricular and extracurricular activities and bursting with the sounds of learning, collaboration and fun. It has been a delight to engage with many of you during our coffee mornings and Parents' Evenings, as well as welcoming prospective families to both the Junior and Senior School. However, I think it is fair to say that the pace has taken its toll on all of us, and we are ready for a good, well-deserved rest.

To that end, I would like to use this opportunity to talk about how we can ensure just that. I am going to start with the concept of active rest: it may seem like an oxymoron but it is very valuable in facilitating relaxation and rejuvenation. Physically active rest could involve going for a walk or doing yoga, some sort of low impact exercise which gets our blood pumping but does not overexert the body. Active mental rest could be puzzling over a jigsaw, immersing in a crossword or doing some mindful colouring: they require some brain power but are low threat activities with little of consequence attached to their successful completion. This makes them ideal for recuperating after this period of intense mental and physical activity.

However there is also a meaningful place during holidays for inactive rest. Picture yourself lounging on the sofa with your favourite snack and latest binge watch to just veg out. And, of course, there is plenty of time for sleep. Many of you will share in the joy of turning off the weekday alarm at the start of the holiday and, while my body clock may wake me at the usual time for the first few days, it soon realises that there is no need to get up and lets me sleep a little longer. We all understand the significance of sleep: this natural suspension of consciousness is when the powers of the body are restored and is one of the four pillars of good health. The quality of our sleep influences the choices we make in the other three pillars: our nutrition, exercise and stress management. Thus it is vital that we strive for high quality sleep however long we are able to spend in bed.

Let's begin with nutrition. When sleep-deprived, we tend to feel hungrier and make less optimal food choices. The feeling of hunger is not just psychological: physiologically you are hungrier too as missing out on sleep disrupts our hunger hormones, increasing ghrelin which causes hunger and decreasing leptin which makes us feel full. This is compounded by our propensity to eat more when we are tired. Indeed a study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that missing a few hours of sleep, for just one night, causes people to eat an average of 559 calories more the next day. And, of course, those additional calories come from ultra-processed, calorie dense (and highly attractive) treats like crisps, cakes and biscuits. That does not help when the same study at the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that our quality of sleep impacts our ability to be active and take exercise. When people get less sleep they also choose lower-intensity activities, perform workouts at lower intensity or abstain from exercise altogether.

Unfortunately lack of sleep also impairs our capacity to handle the everyday stresses of life. It affects memory, judgement and mood, rendering us more susceptible to feeling stressed and - of course - sleeping less well because of it. A lack of sleep also lowers the threshold at which we perceive ourselves to be stressed, meaning that we can lose perspective and see

situations as potentially more stressful than they actually are. This vicious cycle can be challenging to break.

It is important to acknowledge that rest doesn't always require extended periods of time. Sometimes we think that's what we need but I remember reading a newspaper article in one of the broadsheets which reported on an interesting study. The study showed that the effects of a holiday of 2 to 3 days in length were the same as a holiday which was a week in length. Now, don't worry, I have absolutely no plans to shorten our precious holidays, but this was interesting and made me more determined than ever to enjoy those little pockets of rest, in addition to the more conspicuous ones, like the long summer holiday. The biggest spoiler of rest is worrying about the end of rest. So when you get the chance to rest, take it, grab it and do it your own way.

And so, to half term. I hope that you and your children will enjoy a most relaxing break and recuperate from the hard work which has gone into making the first half of term such a success. It's amazing to see how much our students and staff have achieved in just six weeks. In particular, I would like to extend my warm congratulations to Mrs Forysth who is now, alongside her role as Teacher of Mathematics and Further Mathematics, Careers Coordinator. This is a whole school responsibility to oversee and develop the provision for Careers and I know she will be a great source of support to our students.

I look forward to welcoming everyone back on Monday 6 November for the second half of term. Until then, my warmest wishes to you all for a very happy and fulfilling holiday.

With best wishes,

**Dr Lee**  
**Head**