



COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Why ‘Back to School Time’ & the Fall Can Be Stressful

“The difference between school and life? In school, you’re taught a lesson and then you take a test. In life, you’re given a test that teaches you a lesson.” ~ Tom Bodett

Transitions can be uncomfortable. Even with the beautiful weather and opportunities for socializing, vacationing, and play time, summers can still be stressful for many because our schedules change. When we approach the transition from summer to fall, the kids are going back to school, football season is upon us, and the leaves will change as the air becomes crisp and cool. Fall is traditionally a season of slowing down, but the transition can actually feel hectic as we change gears and downshift from the activities of summer to the back-to-school rush.

Research shows that we can all experience an increase in anxiety and depression this time of year because of how our memories function. Our brains operate by associative memory, meaning we pair experiences with emotions, feelings, and even sensations. For example, when you experience something traumatic such as death of a loved one, divorce, loss of a case, etc., your brain will pair the feelings you experienced with the “feel” of that time of year. During the anniversary of the event, the weather, the landscape, and the sights and smells may trigger the same feelings that you had even though the event is long over. Alternatively, if there is a stressful or anxiety producing event that repeats itself for years at the same time each year, such as the return to school, that can become a strong imprint on our memory.

Regardless of our chronological age, all lawyers have had years of experiencing “back to school” and all the feelings and emotional responses associated with it this time of year. What does this time of year mean for you? Did you enjoy getting on that school bus in grade school? What about high school? How about heading back to college? Law school? Most likely you have mixed feelings for this time of year. In order to create new and more positive associations, we need to find ways during this transitional time to have fun and enjoy ourselves.

When we have fun, we release the healthiest chemicals in our body, including endorphins. When released, endorphins reduce our perception of physical and psychological pain or stress. They ward off anxiety, depression, and improve sleep. And guess what - they make you feel HAPPY, which in turn boosts your immune system, increases intimacy, and protects you from the damaging effects of stress.

How can you release endorphins? Below is a list of easy, fun ways to release endorphins. Do you regularly do any of these? Which ones could you increase this time of year?

1. **Laugh**: At yourself, a movie, a TV show, a funny or ironic situation happening around you, with friends, with your spouse, with your children. JUST LAUGH MORE! Challenge yourself to laugh at least 10 times in a day. See what happens.
2. **Eat chocolate**: We all know that dark chocolate is best, but pretty much any kind will boost your mood. Just watch the quantity. As with most things, moderation is the key!
3. **Love**: Intimacy with a partner/spouse releases massive quantities of endorphins. Single? Not to worry. Intimacy with friends and family works to release happy chemicals in your body too.
4. **Listen to music**: Make sure it is a style that you enjoy, and your body and mind will thank you.
5. **Eat spicy foods**: Eating spicy foods, such as chilis, cause the body to release endorphins to override the momentary painful sensation on the tongue.
6. **Meditation**: Sitting quietly and focusing only on your breath for a few minutes or better yet, an hour a day allows our ever working legal minds to REST. The body will reward you for it.
7. **Acupuncture, Massage, and Exercise**: Our bodies reward us when we move them. Holistic methods like acupuncture and massage help move stagnant tissue in the body and exercise moves muscles.
8. **Laugh**: Oh, we already mentioned this one. Probably because it is the most important.

If your brain and body are tired, reward them with some endorphins today and create positive associations with this time of year!

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