May is National Mental Health Awareness month. Stresses and tensions of end-of-semester deadlines and final exams all tend to seemingly snowball at the last minute. Once you fill in that last oval on the Scantron test, and haphazardly pull out of the 21st street parking lot, you can exhale and revel in the fact that you are freeeeee…..(until August, or sooner if you have a summer class).

If you are fortunate enough to have a summer break, the next few months could be a window of opportunity to rejuvenate, or reinvent yourself. Give yourself a mental break and invest some time in activities which you love but have not had time to do.

Breathe the free fresh air! Take advantage of having a less rigorous schedule and partake in one or two of the hobbies that have been sitting on the back burner. With summer in lieu, what better time to sign up for that cycling class you’ve been considering or introduce jogging into your daily habits!

The sun is an excellent source of Vitamin D, which can help decrease symptoms of depression. The body absorbs sunshine and uses cholesterol to make vitamin D. As little as ten minutes of daily sun exposure may improve your mood. Be sure to use a sunscreen with at least SPF 15 to protect your skin from harmful UV rays.

Catch up on lost sleep and try establishing a regular sleep schedule. The normal range is 7 to 9 hours each night. Lack of sleep can lead to slower reaction times and faulty decision making which can lead to accidents, and even depression.

Accidents are the number one cause of death among people under the age of 25; therefore, be wise and take extra safety precautions in your summer travel and endeavors. It is my wish to you to have a prosperous summer and return in the fall with a fresh outlook and renewed vitality to meet the next school year head on.

A favorite Spartan quote: “Fear has two meanings. Forget everything and run, or face everything and rise. The choice is yours.”

Dear Ask-A-Shocker-Nurse,

I just took a summer job working in lawn care for the summer. What is the best way to protect myself from sun exposure?

This is a great question! Here are some helpful hints to live by….

Limit time in the midday sun
The sun’s UV rays are the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. To the extent possible, limit exposure to the sun during these hours.

Watch for the UV index
This important resource helps you plan your outdoor activities in ways that prevent overexposure to the sun’s rays.

Use shade wisely
Seek shade but keep in mind that shade structures such as trees, umbrellas or canopies do not offer complete sun protection. Remember the shadow rule: “Watch your shadow – Short shadow, seek shade!”

Wear protective clothing
A hat with a wide brim offers good sun protection for your eyes, ears, face, and the back or your neck. Sunglasses that provide 99 to 100 percent UV-A and UV-B protection will greatly reduce eye damage from sun exposure. Tightly woven, loose fitting clothes will provide additional protection from the sun.

Use sunscreen
Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen of SPF 15+ liberally and re-apply every two hours, or after working, swimming, playing or exercising outdoors.