



Autumn is looming, and so we wave a fond farewell to summer and its distractions – a time when we’re more active and sociable, and we welcome the unfamiliarity of new places and the boost of a much-needed break.

Summer certainly provides enough escapism to divert our attention, but when it’s over – and there’s no more R&R in the diary for the foreseeable future – we’re confronted with shorter days, gloomy weather, work, debt or other worries. On top of that, while summer is fun, it’s also disruptive and, as creatures of habit, we may find ourselves a bit unsettled by the change in routine. It’s no wonder we may be feeling ‘meh’.

Post-holiday blues are a reaction to our return to reality and any troubles we may have ignored during months of sun. ‘We had a good time during our break and felt uplifted, but coming back home, we have to face the fact that some things in our life need to be looked at, and changed,’ says life coach and psychotherapist Karin Peeters*. ‘Combine this with the sun and warmth disappearing, while grey skies and cold weather lie ahead, and we can really start to feel quite low.’

This is so common, says Karin, that, ‘people often end therapy when the hopeful spring weather starts, only to return in September because they realise the outer conditions were temporarily better, but the inner work is not yet completed.’

You may also be feeling concerned that as you head towards the year’s end, any targets you set for yourself haven’t been fully realised. ‘Many of us, consciously or unconsciously, become aware of how much of the year has already passed, and use it as a moment to measure how well we did,’ explains Karin. We may then get stressed, she says, when we realise we’re playing catch-up with our goals.

Rather than viewing the oncoming winter as months of wrestling with regret, or a fallow period when nothing happens, actively embrace stillness. ‘We like to imagine that it’s possible for life to be one eternal summer... we dream of an equatorial habitat, forever close to the sun, an endless, unvarying high season,’ says Katherine May in her book *Wintering* (£10.99, Ebury). ‘But life’s not like that... once we stop wishing it were summer, winter can be a glorious season... it’s a time for reflection and recuperation, for slow replenishment, for putting your house in order.’

Karin agrees. ‘This is the time to press the pause button and connect with what is going on deep inside,’ she says. ‘It can feel exciting, if a little daunting, but feeling down is not the same as naturally embracing a slower pace and using this opportunity to turn inwards.’ Karin quotes the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh: ‘If the plant does not become dormant in the winter, it cannot be reborn in the spring.’ By following the cycles of nature, we give ourselves the opportunity to regenerate.

‘Regard it as a time of transformation, from the death of the old to the birth of the new,’ says Karin.

‘We might feel that certain ways of thinking and behaving are no longer serving us and need to be let go of, but we draw a huge question mark on what our life might look like instead. This space between the old that no longer applies and the new that is not yet known is called “the void” in psychotherapy. It can feel like a scary place to be. But it’s also fertile ground for new opportunities.’

So, if you didn’t meet that special someone, or start that project, or tick something off your bucket list, banish that guilt. Rather than measure your success in external results, think about how you’ve grown as a person, says Karin. ‘You might have become more kind to yourself, and to others. Or less argumentative, and more patient. In the end, it’s the development of your inner being that matters most.’ >>

TURN OVER FOR THE PRACTICAL TIPS THAT CAN HELP...

93%
of people say
a holiday improves
their mental
health**

KEEP THAT HOLIDAY FEELING GOING

Chances are you walked more or even hired a bike on holiday. So get out of the habit of using the car for short journeys when back in your usual routine. Walking for 20 minutes a day reduces the risk of heart disease by 30%, according to Harvard Medical School. What’s more, simply standing up for three hours a day is as beneficial for your health as running 10 marathons a year, says Professor Mike Loosemore of the Institute of Sport, Exercise & Health.