

## Dolce Far Niente — It Is Sweet Doing Nothing



After a hectic 6 months with hardly a day free from clinical, academic, or editorial work, I suddenly found myself with a weekend with nothing scheduled. As much as I love what I do, I could hardly believe my good fortune! So, I slept late both days instead of climbing out of bed between 5 and 6 AM. I took a leisurely pace with my daily exercise program and spent time talking about nothing particularly important with family and friends. Saturday evening we had dinner in a restaurant followed by a viewing of a thoroughly fascinating play followed by bedtime at a very reasonable hour. Sunday was a repeat of Saturday, with a visit to a contemporary art museum replacing the play performance. It was a wonderful relief from my usual hectic 7-day-a-week work, travel, and homework assignments. Immediately, I was reminded of a phrase told to me many years ago by a friend who lived in Rome: “dolce far niente,” or it is sweet doing nothing. Yes, it was indeed a pleasure having nothing to do but quiet, relaxing, and restful activities done solely to amuse myself.

After this wonderful weekend interlude, I was a bit curious about the origin of this famous Italian phrase and decided to see what information could be gleaned from the Internet. The Wiktionary said that this old Italian saying implied delicious idleness or sheer indulgent relaxation and blissful laziness, or being deliciously idle.<sup>1</sup> There were 2 companies in Italy with this name that rented tourist apartments. The Merriam-Webster dictionary noted that it was first used in 1814, but did not state who had said it, nor the circumstances that led to its enunciation.<sup>2</sup> The movie “Eat, Pray, Love” had a segment where friendly Italians explain the concept to an American tourist who is visiting.<sup>3</sup> Their idea of dolce far niente is to take time to relax completely and contemplate nothing very serious or thought provoking.

One Web site had a series of rules for achieving “dolce far niente.”<sup>4</sup> I have abbreviated and paraphrased these guidelines and added some of my own thoughts below, hopefully for the edification of my physician friends and readers who need to have the same delicious weekend that I just spent. So, think about taking a weekend or a few days of dolce far niente activity. I truly felt more refreshed and able to think more clearly when I returned to my responsibilities, and I think any hard-working physician would also benefit as much as I did at the end of a day or 2 spent outside your usual schedule. In

my opinion, we doctors are some of the most focused and hard-working individuals in our society, and some refreshing breathing space at regular intervals is definitely indicated. But, guess what, I am back to work today and my calendar is full to overflowing, and I can’t wait for the next dolce far niente weekend, although it will be a while before I get there.

### GUIDELINES FOR DOLCE FAR NIENTE

- Turn off your TV—there is nothing there worth watching anyway.
- Drink wine with lunch unless you have to go back to work and don’t want your colleagues to get the wrong idea when they smell your breath.
- Sit still and listen to nothing or gaze and daydream, but don’t fall asleep.
- Eat something totally delicious and decadent like chocolate mousse, and savor every bite. Take a deep breath through your nose while eating the mousse in order to maximize your sense of its taste.
- Read something romantic such as a Shakespeare love sonnet or something similar in a more modern vein.
- Write or call someone special in your life and talk about nothing much, but be sure to tell them how much you enjoy their presence in your life.
- Make dinner with your lover. Don’t try to make anything too complex and, by the way, turn on some music and work leisurely in the kitchen.
- Go for a walk after dinner and don’t talk about politics, religion, or the children!
- Don’t even think about going on Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, or any other Internet activity.

As usual, I am always happy to hear from readers on our blog at [amjmed.org](http://amjmed.org).

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