

## **Cold Reality: Finding Peace on a College Swing Set**

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Swinging in the middle of February?... this is so dumb. Is this even worth it? Am I wasting my time instead of studying for my quantitative methods quiz? These were some of the thoughts that filled my overstimulated college-student mind as I came butt to board with an outdoor singular swing hanging from a tree at Lafayette College in Easton, Pa on a Wednesday night.

It was around 7 p.m., shortly after my weekly one hour meeting with the Disciple Christian Fellowship club at Farinon College Center. At the meetings, we shared about ways to best encourage each other in our faith. As I exited the huge white and grey building and started to make my way to my dorm, I remembered seeing somewhere that swinging has been found to help with stress.

Being that stress isn't that hard of a thing to come by as a college student, I decided to give it a shot and see just how much of a stress reliever swings were. What did I have to lose anyway, except a few minutes of productivity?

As I started to take my seat on the swing by Ramer History House decorated with icicles, I braced myself for the onslaught I was about to take from the about 10-degree weather.

My feet barely touched the ground, and I realized I needed to tuck them under to gain momentum. As I swung back and forth, childhood memories of my journey to America resurfaced.

The pressure and responsibility that I place on myself to be perfect in everything I do slowly started lifting off.

*Forward, back, forward*

I started to reflect on my journey. How did a nervous 9-year-old boy from Lagos, Nigeria, arriving at JFK Airport become a 20-year-old student at a private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania?

Although I didn't have an answer to this grand question, I wanted to discover just how much swinging can help with stress.

The National Library of Medicine, which is the National Center for Biotechnology Information, set out an experiment to discover just how much going back and forth can help alleviate stress among college students.

“We aimed to test a very practical approach to alleviate stress among college students by achieving vestibular stimulation using swings,” it said. “In this study 60 male and female participants were randomly assigned into vestibular stimulation or control groups. Depression, anxiety, stress scores, sleep quality, heart rate, blood pressure, Autonomic functions, respiratory, haematological, cognitive function, Quality of life were recorded before and after 1st, 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th days of vestibular stimulation.”

Despite the experiment looking promising, none of this crossed my mind as my hands started to numb from the cold.

Although the cold was a nuisance, I was having too much fun to let it stop me. I kept going, making sure my feet were tucked and my body was relaxed.

*Back, forward, back*

The National Library of Medicine highlighted the benefits of vestibular stimulation.

“STAI S and STAI T scores were significantly improved on day 28th following vestibular stimulation. Diastolic and mean arterial blood pressure were significantly decreased and remained within normal limits in vestibular group on day 28th following vestibular stimulation. Postural fall in blood pressure was significantly improved on day 14 onwards, following vestibular stimulation. Respiratory rate was significantly improved on day 7 onwards, following vestibular stimulation. PSQI sleep disturbance, PSQI sleep latency, PSQI total score and bleeding time was significantly improved following vestibular stimulation,” it said.

The site went on to conclude that the presence of swings on college campuses could potentially be beneficial.

“Our study supports the adoption of vestibular stimulation for stress management. Hence, placement of swings in college campuses must be considered, which may be a simple approach to alleviate stress among college students,” it said.

In April 2022, 12 swings were installed around Lafayette College’s campus thanks to Remy Oktay ’23 and Kristen Steudel ’22. The swings were installed to help the campus community enjoy the outdoors, connect with nature, and boost feelings of happiness and joy.

Steudel voiced her opinions on the swings.

“Swings are super fun! They are a great way to take in the outdoors and relax with friends between classes,” she said. “We hope they will bring people together around campus and help people enjoy the fresh air. They are for the enjoyment of the outdoors and for helping students refresh their thoughts.”

The installation of the swings was a collaborative effort with more than 45 campus organizations decorating the swings and students helping in their installation.

Otkay stated his thoughts on what the swings mean to the campus.

“As we had various organizations come to decorate the swings, I noticed a few instances where after significant time was spent by an individual, they became quite protective of their work. It’s exactly this idea that we’re aiming for, where we can get people to protect something they love by buying into an idea and contributing their personal expression,” he said.

Otkay went on to share about the deeper meaning behind the swings. “We see this is a microcosm for Earth Day in that the swings facilitate a new connection with nature and trees, and students will then begin to see beauty in them in a new way, protecting them with a little more might as they move through their lives,” he said.

As I continued to share my attention between the sky and the ground, I began to meditate on how God’s plan for my life has been unveiled over these past three years on campus.

*Forward, back, forward*

Thoughts of gratitude began to fill my mind. Being high school valedictorian, earning a full-tuition scholarship with a group of amazing individuals, stepping outside my shell freshman year, meeting amazing people on campus, and even securing my first internship, I was grateful for it all.

I took a deep breath and exhaled when I realized that God still has so much more in store.

*Back, forward, back*

My thoughts slowly started to transition to the people I miss. My mom, sister, church family, and best friend who is abroad in Denmark for the semester.

As a junior, despite being used to spending long periods away from home, not seeing the people I love for a good amount of time doesn’t get any easier. I have gotten so accustomed to my best friend being around that his being away made campus feel like it was a different setting.

I wasn't the only one on campus who enjoyed swinging. Other students talked about what swings meant to them.

Junior Carson Belaire opened up on the impact swings had on his childhood. "As a kid, I spent hours at my local park simply swinging. I remember pumping my legs, leaning back and feeling the wind rush through my hair as I launched into the air and down back again," he said. "The exhilaration of weightlessness for just a moment was addicting."

Belaire went on to describe the transition that has taken place with swinging. "Even now I find myself going back to the swings on campus, letting my inner child run free," he said. "It is a release from the pent-up stress and busy schedules of a college student, a steady rhythm of back and forth movements that keep me grounded."

Belaire continued with his observations and sense of escape while swinging. "As I watch the world pass by, seeing students rush to class and friends laughing nearby, I feel I can escape for a few moments," he said.

Although Belaire voiced his deep admiration for swings, he admitted that swings aren't the solution to all of life's problems.

"While I wouldn't say swinging erases my stress, it relaxes me, clearing my mind to think amidst the chaos that life throws at me," he continued. "For me, this is most helpful for study breaks. It allows me to pause whatever I'm doing, and then resume when I am ready."

Though college students rarely use swings during February's cold weather, activity typically increases as temperatures rise.

As the wind picked up and my numb hands continued to hold on tight to the ropes, I started to consider going inside. I was reluctant at first because I don't get this chance too often. It reminded me of when my best friend and I stargazed on the grass on a random night.

I continued to debate if I should stay on longer in the hopes of more thoughts surfacing that I could work through.

I started to think about and plan out my next day. I thought about tomorrow's 8 a.m. class and what I will be doing for the four-hour gap until my next one.

Despite all of tomorrow's anxieties, I was sure that my experience spent swinging would help me face them. I felt more calm and light-hearted compared to when I first got on the swing.

Realizing that all of this was for a class assignment, I took my final deep breath and exhaled as I began to get off the swing. I started walking towards my dorm, which wasn't far off but felt like an eternity away. I remembered that I had a quantitative methods quiz waiting to be studied for.