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Wellness Online
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December Health News

December is Holiday Wellness Month

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Relax! Easy Ways to Reduce Holiday Stress

The holiday season is supposed to be joyful and merry—and that can be stressful. Here are a few tips to help reduce the stress.

The holidays can bring some extra stress—but there are ways to manage that stress. Here are a few tips to help you relax and enjoy the holidays.

Create a game plan. A little time spent organizing can be a big time-saver later. Make a list of what you need to purchase and set a realistic deadline for buying items. Try to shop ahead of time, before things are picked over and you're under pressure. If you'll be cooking, plan your menu. Think whether some items could be prepared ahead and frozen or refrigerated. Having guests? Ask them to bring a dish to cut down on your work.

Make a budget and stick to it. Money is one of the major stressors during the holidays. Don't dig yourself into a hole by overspending. A thoughtful gift doesn't have to be expensive. If money is tight, suggest a family gift exchange with an accepted spending limit.



Accept reality. Guests may arrive late. Your mother may get on your nerves. The turkey may be dry. Real life isn't a holiday special. Don't expect perfect decorations, a perfect meal or perfect people. Relax, go with the flow and enjoy what you have.

Beware of unhealthy stress relievers. Holiday stress causes some people to fall into bad habits such as smoking, drinking or eating too much. Think about any unhealthy habits you're prone to and about better ways to handle the stress. For example, if you've quit smoking, talk with another family member who doesn't smoke to give you support if tobacco is around.

Create new traditions. Stressed out by the usual festivities? Try something different. Instead of cooking a huge meal on your own, make it a potluck. Ask adults to bring gag gifts or have a "white elephant" or used book gift exchange. Attend a local holiday concert, walk the neighborhood to look at holiday lights or go sledding. Looking to bring the true meaning of the holidays into perspective? Try volunteering. You can include your children in volunteer activities, too.

Make time for your health. In the holiday rush, don't let your well-being fall by the wayside. Try to stay on your normal sleep schedule and get regular exercise. If you can't find a 30-minute chunk of time for exercise, break it up into three 10-minute sessions spread through the day. Be sure to talk with your doctor if you're increasing your activity level.

Give yourself a break. In the midst of doing things for others, it's easy to forget to take care of ourselves. If you feel stress building up, get away for a few minutes. Find a quiet corner and do some deep breathing, listen to calming music or just sit. Or throw on a coat and slip outside for a walk.

Be proactive. Think about what has been most stressful for you this holiday season. Then make proactive plans for what you will do differently for the next holiday season.

Enjoy! The holidays are supposed to be a time of joy and togetherness. In the flurry of the holidays, we sometimes forget what we're celebrating. Remember to savor the time with people you love.



How to Keep Your Heart Healthy (and Your Waistline Trim) at Holiday Meals

Holiday meals, with turkey or ham and all the fixings, can turn the dining room table into a high-fat smorgasbord.

The typical holiday meal is laden with fat: gravies made with meat drippings, mounds of creamy mashed potatoes and your favorite pies. American adults usually gain one to two pounds each year, including slightly less than one pound during the holidays alone.

How bad is pigging out at holiday meals? Over time, that gradual weight can raise your risk of serious health problems, such as diabetes, arthritis and cardiovascular disease. Studies also show that fats—especially those found in vegetable shortening, margarine and some oils—can clog the arteries and contribute to heart disease.

Transforming high-calorie holiday fare

A traditional holiday dinner of turkey, stuffing, other dishes and desserts can exceed 2,500 calories and 130 grams of fat. That's just for one meal. These are more calories than you should consume in a whole day.

But, there are ways to de-fat holiday meals and keep your arteries and your taste buds happy. Here are some tips:

De-fat your gravy

Two tablespoons of regular gravy contain about 4 grams of fat and most people pour on more than that. Try pouring meat drippings into a container ahead of time and then refrigerating. The fat rises to the surface so you can peel it off.

Un-stuff the stuffing

One benefit of this is that the stuffing does not absorb all the fat from the bird. Also, the inside of the bird gets cooked more thoroughly, killing any salmonella that may be present. Try adding nuts and fruits instead of sausage or turkey giblets in your stuffing.

Nix the butter

Try adding a little brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg to your sweet potatoes instead of butter. Bake them in a nonstick baking pan.

Remove the skin

A 3 ½-ounce serving of roast turkey breast with skin has 197 calories and 8.3 grams of fat. Without skin, it has 157 calories and 3.2 grams of fat.

Bring out the fruits and vegetables

Focus on pumpkin, carrots, sweet potatoes or other orange vitamin-packed vegetables. Greens such as broccoli, spinach and collard greens all pack vitamin power too. Serve colorful raw veggies with low-fat dip as an appetizer.

Don't starve yourself until dinner

Have a healthy breakfast so you don't load up at the big meal. When you sit down to eat, try just a little bit of everything and go easy on second helpings and dessert.

The benefits of exercise

Take a walk after dinner, or exercise sometime during the day to offset meal calories. Several studies have shown that moderate exercise after a fatty meal helps prevent fat from affecting your arteries. Take a 45-minute walk two hours after a high-fat meal, or three 10-minute walks over a three-hour period. But always check with your doctor before you increase your activity level, especially if you have medical problems or have been inactive.

So, enjoy your meal, but prepare it with less fat and walk it off afterwards. Your arteries and your waistline will thank you!

Alone for the Holidays?

If you're planning to spend the holidays by yourself, be open to new ideas and opportunities to get in the spirit of the season.

The holidays are a great time to be with family and friends. But if you're alone this holiday season, don't be blue. It's a great time to recharge your batteries and celebrate you.



Some people struggle with being single this time of year. You may be spending your first holiday without a spouse, or the kids have grown up and moved away. Perhaps you're short of finances and can't enjoy the holidays as you'd like. Or maybe you simply don't have a date for New Year's Eve. Know that you are not alone!

Try to reverse any negative feelings and make a point to enjoy the spoils of the season. Here are just a few things to celebrate:

- **A little time off work.** Most people get at least some personal time off during the holidays. You might plan ahead and use the extra time to try a new class (cooking, crafts, an unexplored activity or interest), visit the library or tackle a long-delayed project at home. Use the time off to recharge your batteries physically and emotionally.
- **A chance to get creative.** Are you exchanging gifts with friends, family or co-workers? Look through magazines or online for ideas about things you can make, bake...or rake! An I.O.U. to a neighbor to help with yard chores is a thoughtful seasonal gift. Your local hobby store may be offering classes in a new activity that interests you. Try out a new fitness class. Feeding a new interest or a new way to express yourself can be a special gift—from you, to you.
- **Volunteer opportunities.** Many charitable organizations need extra help during the holidays. It can be an especially lonely time for older people or those living on assistance or at a shelter. Donating time, food or personal supplies might give you something to feel good about.

Whether you're away from family or friends or simply prefer time by yourself this time of year, being alone doesn't have to mean being lonely. Even during the holidays—and maybe *especially* during the holidays—it's perfectly healthy to devote time to

yourself. Being content to spend time by yourself can be a sign of good mental health. But we all still need positive relationships and the company of other people to thrive.

Toward that end, helpguide.org suggests these healthy strategies for connecting with other people:

- **Ditch the digital world for a while.** Real-life communications is vital for everyone. There's a reason "e-friend" has not made it to the dictionary. It's an inadequate substitute for a human relationship.
- **Find people you enjoy.** Try to reach out to someone—a friend, neighbor, family member or co-worker—every day for positive, upbeat conversation. Invite someone to meet you for coffee to either start or strengthen a relationship. Sometimes you may have a supportive word for them; other times their words may benefit you.
- **Give your time or expertise.** Find a nonprofit whose purpose is meaningful to you. They are bound to have opportunities for group or individual volunteering that will put you around other people.
- **Join.** Find a community of interest that will lead you to people with similar likes, hobbies or interests.

Remember what's important

Don't say yes to too much. Don't be around people who will cause you stress or unhappiness. Sometimes that may not be possible if they are family or co-workers, but limit the amount of time you will be around them. Don't overspend your budget and wind up with months of financial hardship. If you feel overwhelmed, consider seeing a professional such as a psychologist or other trained professional to help you manage your holiday stress.



UHC Online Seminar Enjoy the Holidays without Gaining Weight

Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD

December 13, 2016

12:30 p.m. ET, 11:30 a.m. CT, 10:30 a.m. MT, 9:30 a.m. PT

Gaining weight is so easy, especially during the holidays when parties and seasonal foods are part of the festivities. Forget starting a diet during this fun, celebratory and often stressful time of year. Instead, this webinar will help teach you how to get through the holidays using 'social weight maintenance', a strategy designed to keep your weight stable. Learn how to use social strategies that will allow you to enjoy the holidays without the dreaded weight gain that you won't have to swear off come January 1st.

To register for an upcoming seminar, visit www.uhc.com/seminars. All seminars are recorded and archived for viewing after the live seminar date.

Test Your Health Care Knowledge!

Take the Quick Care Quiz

Know where to go for quick care? Take December's **Quick Care Quiz** to understand your options and for a chance to win a \$500 Visa gift card.

Click [here](#) to get started! (Quiz launches December 1st.)



Health Tip: HelpGuide.org - a trusted guide to mental, emotional & social health



HelpGuide.org collaborates with Harvard Health Publications, the consumer health publishing division of Harvard Medical School, to make content from Harvard experts available to their readers on numerous topics. Click [here](#) to explore the many featured articles and resources!

December Healthy Recipe: Winter Crisp

Use as a dessert or as a delicious breakfast treat, warmed with a dollop of plain yogurt or cottage cheese.

Filling:

- 1/3 cup sugar
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 1 tsp lemon peel
- 3/4 tsp lemon juice
- 5 large apples, peeled, cored and sliced
- 1 cup coarsely chopped cranberries

Topping:

- 2/3 cup rolled oats
- 1/3 cup brown sugar, packed
- 1/4 cup whole-wheat flour
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 Tbsp trans-fat-free margarine, melted



Directions

Filling: Combine sugar, flour and lemon peel in a medium bowl; mix well. Add lemon juice, apples and cranberries; stir to mix. Spoon into a large baking dish.

Topping: Combine oats, brown sugar, flour and cinnamon in a small bowl. Stir in melted margarine. Sprinkle topping over filling. Bake in a 375° F oven for 40 to 50 minutes or until filling is bubbly and top is brown. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Yield: 6 servings

Nutritional Information:

Calories: 284
 Fat: 6g
 Saturated Fat: 1g
 Cholesterol: 0mg
 Sodium: 56mg
 Carbohydrate: 52g
 Dietary Fiber: 5.5g
 Protein: 5.5g

Source: myOptumHealth

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