



Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

December 2015

This holiday season, find a healthy balance between overjoyed and overwhelmed.

As joyful as the holiday season can be, it can also be overwhelming. And for a lot of us, “over” seems to be the key word. It’s tempting to overeat and overdo. It’s easy to overspend. If you’ve been trying to lose weight, pay off debt or achieve other goals, maintaining progress can be a challenge this month. The potential of added pounds or extra debt come January can put a damper on your feelings about the holidays. Likewise, if you’re already feeling stressed, you may feel even more anxiety this time of year.¹

It doesn’t have to be that way. Ideally, the holidays are a time of enhanced emotional and physical well-being. With a little thought and planning, we can

make having a healthy and happy season more than a greeting card sentiment.

Be happy: Focus on what matters

Whether you observe Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa or Ramadan, focus on what makes the holiday meaningful to you. Maybe it’s spending time with family, or celebrating your faith. Focusing on what matters makes it easier to let go of things that aren’t as important, things that cause you undue stress. Not to pick on holiday cards, but consider skipping them this year or reducing the number you send if they’ve become a burden. Look for ways that you can spend less time on things that cause you stress, and more time on the things that give you pleasure. You may find that scaling back helps you feel less anxious.²

Set realistic expectations with your kids, especially when it comes to gifts. If money is tight, be open about the fact that you don’t have an unlimited supply. Even Santa’s on a budget. Starting from a young age, kids can learn the importance of living

within their means.³ As a family, find ways to give from the heart. Talk to each other about what’s important. Help your child choose outgrown toys and books to donate to those in need. Help an elderly neighbor string holiday lights.

Just as you focus on what matters most about the holidays, it’s important to acknowledge what stresses you. Relationship issues don’t take a holiday, especially where family’s involved. Or you may be worried about a health problem, or grieving the loss of a loved one. Go easy on yourself. Let a close friend or a family member know what you’re going through. Don’t wait until after the holidays, hoping you’ll feel better. You can also find tools and resources to help with many issues at liveandworkwell.com, or call your Employee Assistance Program to talk with a specialist.

Be healthy: Stay on track

Try to maintain, not gain. Holiday parties, family celebrations and traditions often revolve around food. Research shows that most of us don’t gain

Tips for managing holiday stress

Being stressed can lead to unhealthy behaviors like overeating or drinking in excess. The American Psychological Association offers tips for parents, including the idea of setting expectations, discussed in this article. Here are a few other ideas that can help you stay grounded now and throughout the year.⁴

Keep your perspective: Look at the big picture. Everything doesn’t have to be perfect.

Connect with others: Reconnect with family and friends. Accept help and support if you need it, and help others when you can.

Take care of yourself: Don’t overlook your own needs and feelings. Do something for yourself every day.

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as much as we fear over the holidays, but we tend not to lose what we've gained. And an extra couple pounds each year can add up over time. While you shouldn't expect to lose weight this time of year, try to maintain it.⁵

Promise to take care of yourself. The American Heart Association suggests making a pact with yourself to maintain healthy habits over the holidays. For instance, commit to getting 30 minutes of daily exercise.⁶ Vow to take a couple of brisk, 15-minute walks every day. Exercise helps relieve stress and may help prevent weight gain.⁷ (Check with your doctor before starting any exercise plan.)

Take time for yourself. Take 10 to 15 minutes out of your day to sit and relax without disruption. Use deep-breathing techniques to clear your mind and help you to feel refreshed. You may also want to schedule time in your day to take a walk, listen to music or read a good book.

Savor the season. Foods that are high in fat, salt or sugar are everywhere this time of year. If you're headed off to a party, eat a healthy snack first so you're not overly hungry when greeted by the buffet table. And don't just start at one end and graze through, filling your plate. Do a little recon mission to see all that's offered so you can choose a healthy balance between not-so-good-for-you treats and healthier items like fruits and veggies. Sit down and enjoy the food, savoring each bite. If you're hosting a party, include dishes that everyone can feel good about enjoying. You'll probably find that a lot of your guests are trying to eat healthier too.⁶

Focus on fun, not food. Plan activities that don't focus on food. Instead of baking cookies or candies, make wreaths or dough-art decorations.⁷ Get outside if the weather allows. Take a walk, skate in the park or snowboard down a hill. If there's no snow where you live, take time to enjoy the warmer weather. There's no right or wrong way to celebrate. Find the right balance for you, and enjoy a healthy, happy holiday season.

Resources

www.liveandworkwell.com

Visit liveandworkwell.com to find articles and resources on enjoying a healthier and happier holiday season. Search for articles on reducing stress, heart-healthy eating and making the holidays safe.

Ask your health benefits representative for your access code to liveandworkwell.com.

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1 Making the most of the holiday season. American Psychological Association. www.apa.org/helpcenter/holiday-season.aspx Published Nov. 2012.

2 Ibid.

3 Tips for parents on managing holiday stress. American Psychological Association. www.apa.org/helpcenter/parents-holiday.aspx.

4 Ibid.

5 Heft for the holidays: How to hold off those extra pounds. *NIH News in Health*. http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2007/November/docs/01features_01.htm Published Nov. 2007.

6 Holiday stress? Try our top 5 tips for a heart-healthy holiday season. American Heart Association. www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/StressManagement/FightStressWithHealthyHabits/Holiday-Stress-Try-Our-Top-5-Tips-for-a-Heart-Healthy-Holiday-Season_UCM_433252_Article.jsp

7 Macaire G. Tips for healthy holiday eating. Sutter Health CPMC website. www.cpmc.org/about/e-health/11-05%20healthy-holidays.html