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In-The-Know Monthly eNewsletter

Holiday Health and Fitness

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Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all anticipate and enjoy the holidays with child-like energy? Children simplify the season. They love the cookies and the decorations and the magic that the holidays bring. With age it seems to get more difficult to capture that feeling. Holiday stress adds to already jam packed schedules. The effort to balance work and life with shopping, baking, cooking and decorating can take the "merry" out of what is dubbed as "the happiest time of the year".

The holidays are here, you may not be able to choose between a stressful or stress-free experience, but you can choose how it affects you. Holiday stress is normal and expected. If your mindset holds thoughts of dread for the season why not explore ways to change your mindset.

Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D, an expert on managing life's stressors, writes, "A mindset is like a filter that colors every experience. Making a deliberate shift in mindset when you're feeling stressed is even more important than having a positive view."

An optimistic outlook helps you cope with the stress of the holidays. What are some things that you can choose to do to bring about that mindset shift?

PRIORITIZE

If you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed by your holiday agenda avoid overscheduling your time. It's okay to say no to celebrations you do not want to attend. Stick with your daily routine as much as possible.

Be organized. Make a list of things you believe you should do for the upcoming holiday season. Prioritize your list. You might discover you can remove some "must do's" from your list. Release expectations. Let go of the need to make everything perfect. Take some time for yourself. Schedule days off to shop. Do more yoga. Go have a massage and definitely laugh more! Laughter reduces stress hormones and helps immune cells function. Get some sunlight. It stimulates serotonin, the "feel good" neurotransmitter. Skip one or two of scheduled play dates with your kids. Keep it simple; do less, enjoy more.

WHAT'S YOUR BUDGET?

How much money can you comfortably spend on gifts? Be mindful of your budget and make a decision to stick to it. Who is on the gift list? Prioritize it. Find a way to cut costs on gifts. Give something personal. Write a love letter or a letter of appreciation to someone special. Frame it. Personal gifts become forever treasures.

Homemade gifts are gifts from the heart. Think creatively; visit your local craft stores for ideas. Buy some Mason jars. Layer the ingredients of your favorite cookie recipe, attach a small spatula from the dollar store, and add a bow and instructions for baking. Make a "sewing jar" with needles, thread, scissors, a thimble and a pin-cushion. How about a jar filled with hot cocoa mix and mini marshmallows? Attach a wooden spoon and an ornament for an instant gift. The possibilities are endless.

Make a holiday legacy photo album. Find some family pictures from your past holiday celebrations. Write your memories of that year's celebration next to the picture. Gift it to a family member. It will be rewarding and a lot of fun when you tackle the role of the family historian.

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

Traditions bring a sense of certainty and comfort to life. Focus on the traditions that make the holidays special for you and your family. Keep only the traditions you enjoy and add your own. Watch a holiday classic, "It's a Wonderful Life" or "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer". Every Friday night in December can be your family's movie night. Decide to make happy memories rather than continue traditions for the sake of tradition.

PREPARATION & PLANNING YOUR DAY

Find a way to manage the tasks on your "need to" list. Hate to bake? Start or join a cookie exchange. Go to your favorite bakery and buy your cookies. Done!

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What's your holiday menu? Ask family members and friends to bring a dish. Prepare & freeze some things ahead.

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Often too many events are scheduled for this time of year. Designate a day and time for exchanging gifts if this is part of your tradition, and don't rush the process.

Plan to eat buffet style. Set rules for your children: no one is excused until dinner is officially over! Avoid hot topic dinner conversations. Turn off your cell phones. Enforce a "no texting" rule during dinner. Take lots of pictures. Pictures create memories. A picture can be next year's gift.

Get help cleaning up. Delegate one task for each person for an organized and timely job. Make dessert a separate event. Take the time to savor the taste!

DEALING WITH LOSS & LONELINESS

There is never a good time to suffer loss of a loved one. It is especially difficult during the holidays. Respect the wishes of those who are grieving. Invite them to join your celebration. Offer to deliver the meal if they choose not to attend.

If you are lonely or grieving, find some resources to help with the healing process. Ervin Staub, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, studied and documented that people who have suffered the most also help the most. He calls it "altruism born of suffering". When facing loss, choosing to care for others can transform depression into a more optimistic outlook. Donate time to the local food pantry or an animal shelter. Petting animals has been proven to reduce stress. You may find yourself alone during the holidays, but you do not need to be lonely. Social interaction is a healthy distraction from sadness or grief. Invite other isolated friends and colleagues for dinner. Find ways to feel better, focusing outside of your-self is a known antidote for loneliness and suffering.

HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

Holidays are not the time to throw healthy behaviors out the door.

Reduce, don't eliminate, the days you go to the gym. Limit indulging with holiday cookies at work. Move more! Take frequent ten-minute breaks to get away from your desk. Find some stairs to climb or cruise the hallways. Do stretches to relieve tension in your body.

Be social and mingle at parties. Talking saves on calorie consumption. Eat balanced meals. Skipping meals in an effort to save calories for the party seldom works. You will justify eating more. Drink water. Match every alcoholic beverage with one glass of cold lemon water. You will hydrate more and drink less. Small changes result in healthier, happier holidays!

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Review the past year with gratitude for the good times and bad. Know that the more common effects of stressful events include strength, growth and resilience.

What do you want to accomplish in 2016? Make a list of your core values. You will discover meaning and purpose for your life when goals line up with core values. Value your health. Be good to your body. Consider ways to improve the relationships in your life, to include the one you have with yourself. Make a decision to avoid criticizing yourself, others and future experiences. Create experiences that bring joy to your life and to the lives of others. Happy equals healthy! Tailor your resolutions to the end goal of creating a happier, healthy 2016.

Ms. Hudson has been a presenter with NITP for over 5 years, and has been working in the health and fitness area since 1982. She specializes in providing lectures on stress management, transition, health and fitness and nutrition/weight management to individuals planning for retirement.

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