

Live Well, Work Well

December 2026

Prioritizing Your Emotional Well-being During the Holidays

While the holiday season and end-of-year festivities can be fun, they can also be stressful and take a toll on your emotional well-being. Putting your emotional wellness on the back burner may cause mood changes and feelings of irritability, hopelessness and isolation.

Nearly 9 out of 10 Americans anticipate stress during the holidays, according to the American Psychological Association.

Consider the following tips to help prioritize your emotional well-being during the holiday season:

- **Practice healthy habits.** Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule and eating a balanced diet will help ensure you have enough physical and mental energy to tackle responsibilities and challenges.
- **Stick to a routine.** It's important to keep a daily schedule for work and personal time. Checking items off your to-do list can also help you feel accomplished on a daily basis.
- **Decrease caffeine and alcohol use.** Although alcohol and caffeine often appear at celebrations, these substances can provoke feelings of depression, anxiety or other mental health challenges.
- **Maintain your boundaries.** Your calendar may quickly fill up with work, personal and social events. Get comfortable saying "no" and reducing extra activities or tasks so you aren't overloaded.
- **Incorporate positive activities.** Get into the habit of taking care of yourself and doing activities that make you happy. During a fast-paced month, it's vital to slow down and prioritize self-care.
- **Recognize your holiday stress triggers and relievers.** Financial pressures and personal demands are common triggers. Stress may cause you to lean on harmful stress relievers and fall into unhealthy habits like smoking or drinking. Becoming aware of your triggers and coping mechanisms allows you to prepare healthy strategies to reduce stress.

If you have concerns about your emotional well-being, contact a mental health professional or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline at 800-662-HELP (4357).

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Mindful Holiday Eating

The holiday season often means more parties and gatherings—and an abundance of festive food and drinks. However, practicing mindful holiday eating can help you savor the season without overdoing it.

Mindful eating focuses on being fully present and aware of one's feelings, thoughts, physical sensations and environment during meals. It makes you fully aware of the eating experience and your thoughts and feelings about food.

This healthy approach encourages focusing on preparing and consuming food in a distraction-free environment. Mindful eating offers physical and mental health advantages, such as better recognition of bodily cues, reduced likelihood of overeating, healthier food choices, stress reduction and weight loss.

Consider these mindful eating tips:

- Honor your hunger and satiety cues.
- Start with small portions.
- Use all five senses when you eat.
- Take small bites and chew slowly.
- Limit distractions while eating.
- Don't skip meals.

Mindful eating doesn't mean avoiding your favorite holiday foods. It's simply about bringing more awareness and enjoyment to your food. You can also try prioritizing the social aspect of gatherings and engaging in meaningful conversations to reduce your focus on food. Contact a dietitian if you need guidance on mindful eating.

Unplug to Reconnect

The holidays are meant for rest and connection, yet a steady stream of notifications can make it difficult to be present. Between gatherings, travel and year-end deadlines, screens can quietly take over the season. A digital detox does not need to be all or nothing. A few realistic boundaries can help you log off and lean into true rest, both at home and work.

Pew Research Center reported that 53% of U.S. adults say they spend too much time on their smartphone. In addition, 1 in 4 adults say they're on their smartphones "almost constantly."

Start by deciding what matters most to you this season, whether it is a family meal, a quiet morning or time with friends. Then set limits that protect those moments. Consider these ideas:

- **Turn off nonessential notifications.** Silence social media, shopping and news alerts so that only the messages you truly need can reach you.
- **Keep gatherings phone-light.** Place devices in a basket near the door, or agree on one time for photos and then put phones away.
- **Prepare for travel.** Download directions, boarding passes, music and shows ahead of time so you can switch to airplane mode.
- **Bookend your days offline.** Try keeping the first and last hour of each day screen-free, and charge your phone outside the bedroom.
- **Plan screen-free activities.** Baking, board games, a walk or a good book can fill time that might otherwise be spent scrolling.

Unplugging does not require giving up devices entirely. Even brief breaks can create space for rest and more meaningful time with the people who matter most this season.

Recipe of the Month

Quick Lasagna

Makes: 9 servings

Ingredients

- 1 lb. lean ground beef (15% fat or less)
- 1 large onion (chopped)
- 1 clove garlic (minced)
- 2 cups spaghetti sauce (divided)
- ¼ cup fresh parsley (chopped)
- 1 tsp. oregano
- 1 tsp. basil
- 1 pint low-fat cottage cheese
- ⅔ cup mozzarella cheese (divided)
- 6 lasagna noodles (uncooked)
- ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Source: USDA

Preparations

1. In a 10-inch skillet or large saucepan, cook the ground beef over medium-high heat until it is no longer pink.
2. Drain the fat. Add the onion and cook until it is soft.
3. Add the garlic, 1 cup of the tomato sauce and the herbs. Stir and spread the mixture evenly in the skillet.
4. Reduce the heat to low, spread the cottage cheese over the mixture and sprinkle with half of the mozzarella. Top with 4 noodles, breaking the remaining 2 to fill in open spaces.
5. Pour the remaining spaghetti sauce evenly over the noodles. Gently press the noodles down to moisten.
6. Cover and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until the noodles are tender. Top with the remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheese, cover and simmer for 2 more minutes or until the cheeses are melted.
7. Let stand covered for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.