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7 WAYS TO REDUCE HOLIDAY STRESS WITH HEALTHY HABITS

Healthy habits can protect you from some of the harmful effects of stress, according to the American Heart Association. Here are seven positive healthy habits you may want to practice in the coming weeks.

1. **TALK WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.** Call or text people close to you to share your feelings, hopes and joys. Ask them to share theirs. A daily dose of friendship is great medicine.
2. **DO SOMETHING PHYSICAL EVERY DAY.** Whether it's walking to work, raking leaves or running to catch a bus, do some form of physical activity on a daily basis. Regular exercise can relieve tension. Physically active people have a lower risk of depression. It's fun, too.
3. **REMEMBER TO LAUGH.** Whether you're laughing at a late show monologue or giggling over a comic strip in the morning paper, laughter does you good. It's a stress reducer, according to the Mayo Clinic. Laughter improves circulation because you bring in more oxygen to your system. It aids muscle relaxation. It may even boost your immune system. Don't be afraid to laugh out loud at something funny, even if no one else is around.
4. **SLOW DOWN.** Try to "pace" instead of "race;" Plan ahead and try to make enough time to get where you're going and get everything done. Keep in mind that crowded streets and bad weather can eat up precious time.
5. **GIVE UP BAD HABITS.** Too much alcohol, cigarettes or caffeine can all raise blood pressure. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. If you smoke, make a plan to quit. Don't rely on energy drinks or endless cups of coffee to get you through the busy season. They could rob you of needed sleep.

QUICKTAKES



BEING MINDFUL WHILE BEING THANKFUL

The holidays are the perfect time for connecting with family and friends. While the hectic holiday schedule can be fun, it can also be stressful. There are a number of strategies to help you de-stress and get through the season. Practicing gratitude is a good place to start.

Research done at U.C. Davis has shown that being thankful can help us feel happier, reduce stress and feel less isolated. It may also strengthen immunity, lower blood pressure and improve sleep. There are many things you can do to become more grateful. For instance, set aside five minutes at bedtime to write down at least five things you are grateful for. Practice this every day. It's not just about what things you have; it can also be about your personal gifts. Think of something bad that happened to you in the past and then think about how far you've come since then.

6. **PRACTICE GIVING BACK.** Volunteer your time at a local charitable organization. Or give a friend a hand. Helping others helps you.
7. **SMILE.** The mere act of smiling can help you deal with stressful situations more easily. Researchers at the University of Kansas studied this effect. They put student recruits in stressful situations and discovered that smiling recruits had the lowest heart rates and recovered from the stress the quickest. "The next time you are stuck in traffic or are experiencing some other type of stress, you might try to hold your face in a smile for a moment," reported Sarah Pressman, one of the researchers. "Not only will it help you 'grin and bear it' psychologically, but it might actually help your heart health as well." Buddy the Elf, played by the inimitable Will Ferrell in the holiday classic film "Elf," perhaps said it best: "I just like to smile! Smiling's my favorite."

Sources:
http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/StressManagement/FightStressWithHealthyHabits/Fight-Stress-with-Healthy-Habits_UCM_307992_Article.jsp#.V_KpLa7w7Pw



De-stress tonight! Stream a comedy classic, make a big bowlful of tasty, healthy popcorn and gather everybody around.

Our staff picks for favorite, laugh-out-loud, comedy classic movies include:

Duck Soup (1933)
Some Like it Hot (1959)
Young Frankenstein (1974)
The Jerk (1979)
Trading Places (1983)
Groundhog Day (1993)
Elf (2003)

HEALTHY POPCORN SNACKS

Popcorn is a whole-grain food. On its own, it's a very healthy snack. But too often, we shower it with salt and drown it in melted butter. Or toss it in oodles of hot caramel. For your healthy movie night, start with a big bowlful (about 9 cups) of hot, air-popped, very lightly salted popcorn and then liven it up with one of these seasoning blends.



MEDITERRANEAN POPCORN

Drizzle hot popcorn with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Toss and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon mixed Italian herbs and 2 tablespoons finely grated Parmesan cheese. Toss again to blend well. *Makes 3 servings.*

Nutrition Info: 127 calories, 3 grams protein, 4 grams carbohydrate, 7 grams fat, 2 grams saturated fat, 3 grams fiber, 150 milligrams sodium

GOMASIO POPCORN

Sprinkle hot popcorn with 2 tablespoons gomasio seasoning (a Japanese seasoning mix of sesame seeds and sea salt — look for it in natural food stores) and 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil. Add a cupful or two of rice crackers if you like. *Makes 3 servings.*

Nutrition Info (without rice crackers): 120 calories, 2 grams protein, 3 grams carbohydrate, 5 grams fat, 1 gram saturated fat, 3 grams fiber, 350 milligrams sodium

ZA'ATAR POPCORN

Toss hot popcorn with 1 tablespoon olive oil and 2 tablespoons za'atar seasoning, a Middle Eastern blend of sumac, sesame and thyme — look for it at Middle Eastern markets. *Makes 3 servings.*

Nutrition Info: 130 calories, 2 grams protein, 3 grams carbohydrate, 6 grams fat, 2 grams saturated fat, 3 grams fiber, 200 milligrams sodium

MEXICAN CHOCOLATE POPCORN

Blend 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa, 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon, a big pinch ground ancho chile (optional) and 1 tablespoon sugar before tossing with hot popcorn. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon melted butter or oil. Toss again. *Makes 3 servings.*

Nutrition Info: 140 calories, 2 grams protein, 4 grams carbohydrate, 5 grams fat, 2 grams saturated fat, 3 grams fiber, 150 milligrams sodium