

Balanced Living

November 2024



Managing Holiday Stress

The holiday season is an exciting time that many look forward to each year. There are opportunities for spending time with friends and family and participating in festivities. However, the holidays can also be a source of stress. For college students, this time of year also comes with the added pressure of looming assignment deadlines and final exams. Here are some tips for balancing your obligations during the holiday season.

Create a To-Do List

When there is a lot going on in your life, it's a great idea to create a to-do list of things you need to get done. When you do not write things down, you may experience extra stress in some situations because you are trying to remember everything in your head, including critical tasks that you can't afford to overlook. Once it's written down, you know what you have to do. Plus, it feels good to cross things off your list as you complete them, which highlights your ongoing accomplishments.

Don't Lose Sight of the Finish Line

Remember that your primary focus should be on academics. Prioritize studying for final exams and completing any other assignments that are due before the winter break starts. Manage your time wisely so that you can find a balance between social events and academic obligations. Once you complete all of your assignments, you'll be able to enjoy your time off even more.

Spending Time with Family

Whether or not you live on campus, you probably don't spend as much time with your family as you used to due to a busy schedule. The holidays are an opportunity to reconnect and spend quality time with your family. Added time with your family could also be a source of stress due to differing personalities. Try to enjoy the company of others and keep the conversations lighthearted by avoiding the topics that you know may lead to heated debates. If you're staying with family over the break, don't forget to give yourself time to decompress. It can be tiring and stressful spending so much time with others, even loved ones. Every now and then, take some time for yourself—go for a walk, read a book, or do something else that's relaxing or recharging.

Gifts

The pressure of buying gifts for people in your life can contribute to holiday stress. Don't feel like you need to buy anyone an expensive, elaborate gift. Your friends and family would rather spend time with you than receive a material object. Some great inexpensive gift options are a framed picture, baked goods, a homemade card, or a secondhand item, such as sharing a book you enjoyed during the year. When it comes to the holiday season, it's best to have a sense of humor and go with the flow. What is most important during this time of the year is meeting your academic goals and spending quality time with those closest to you. With careful planning and the right mindset, you'll find yourself feeling great about how your studies ended and feeling prepared for the challenges to come in the new year.

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Practicing Gratitude in Everyday

Many people live with a mindset of always wanting something more, whether a higher-paying job, different relationships, or material objects. It is easy to see the grass as greener elsewhere and to take aspects of your life for granted. Author Roy T. Bennett said, “Be grateful for what you already have while you pursue your goals. If you aren’t grateful for what you already have, what makes you think you would be happy with more?” Gratitude is the quality of being thankful and can change your life for the better. There are numerous benefits to practicing a life of gratitude, such as improving your mental and physical health, coping skills, happiness, relationships, and sleep, as well as reducing anxiety and depression. Here are some tips for cultivating your practice of gratitude.

Practice mindfulness

Whenever you notice your thoughts shifting to the past or worrying about the future, this is a reminder to refocus on the present moment. Be grateful for things just as they are—right now. Deep breathing exercises can help bring you back to the present moment by slowing down your heart rate, lowering stress levels, and making you feel more relaxed.

Turn off auto pilot

Often your brain runs on auto pilot while performing daily tasks, such as when cooking a meal or driving to work each day. Try to notice when you might be in auto pilot mode, as you are more likely to miss out on what’s right in front of you.

Count your blessings

Grateful people tend to have a sense of abundance rather than scarcity. Be grateful for the big and small things in life. Focus on all that you have versus what you feel your life is lacking. As you begin a gratitude practice, it can be helpful to write down what you’re grateful for on a daily or weekly basis.

Be grateful for yourself

Many people go through the day without showing themselves much self-love. Have gratitude for just being you. Remember that you are worthy and your contribution to the world matters.

Don’t compare yourself to others

Everyone is on their own journey in life and lives within different circumstances. As Theodore Roosevelt said, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” Rather than striving for perfection, do your best with what you have. Even though someone else might seem to have it easier than you in one aspect of life, they likely have other struggles that you don’t know about.

Share your gratitude

It’s important to show ourselves gratitude and feel good when we’ve made a contribution. Equally important is being able to acknowledge other people’s successes and acts of kindness. Realize when people are doing a great job or going out of their way to help you. Let people know when you appreciate them.

Spread positivity

Make an effort to be kind when interacting with others, whether loved ones, coworkers, or strangers. When you approach situations with positivity, notice how people tend to reciprocate. Small gestures like calling someone on their birthday or giving a sincere compliment can go a long way. This can also help foster feelings of gratitude.

Less Is More: How to Simplify Your Life

Life today is complicated. Most Americans are pulled in multiple directions every day by commitments to their families, workplaces and communities. Many people have responded to the pressures of modern life by seeking ways to consciously simplify their routines and attitudes at home and work.

"The goal of living a more simple life isn't to arrive at a static point in your life but to become skilled at balancing your personal relationships, workplace issues, finances and other demands," says Heather G. Mitchener, coauthor of *The 50 Best Ways to Simplify Your Life*.

Being in the moment

One way to simplify your life is to practice mindfulness -- to slow down and recognize and appreciate the simple things in life. To be mindful instead of mindless, stay in the moment and be conscious of what you're doing. Don't think ahead or look back. "When we look ahead constantly, we not only rush through the less pleasant tasks, we also tend to hurry through the things we love to do, because we're always thinking or worrying about what we have to do next," says Ms. Mitchener.

A good way to practice being in the moment is to follow your breath, a technique that doesn't require any special training or self-consciousness. To breathe mindfully, take notice of your breaths and try to make them as calm and even as possible. Your breaths should be long and slow and should come from your diaphragm rather than your upper chest. Pay attention to each breath, letting thoughts fall away. "You can do this exercise any time you think of it," says Ms. Mitchener. "Make it a goal to be mindful, in general, but also set aside short periods to practice. This will improve your ability to make mindfulness a habit. As you learn to live this way, you'll feel more centered."

Slow down

If you feel like you have too much information in your life, stop subscriptions to magazines, newspapers or e-mail newsletters you rarely have time to read. Leave the radio and TV off unless you're really listening to something that matters to you. Turn off your cell phone unless you're making a call or waiting for one that's important. To reduce the amount of "stuff" in your home, ask yourself these questions before you buy something: Do I really need it? How often will I wear or use it? Where will I store it? Is there a reason why I must buy it?

Get organized

Begin by sizing up the problem areas in your home or workplace and making a plan of attack. If you're easily discouraged, start with a small, confined area, such as a single drawer. Otherwise, target an area that gives you the most grief. Your goal should be to clear out clutter that causes you to waste time -- a hall closet that has become a catchall for everything from clothes to sports equipment.

Learn to focus at work. Multitasking can be an asset, but often the lack of focus it requires means you actually get less done in a day, or less done well. To increase your focus and break free from distractions:

- Begin each day by setting priorities on what you want to accomplish.
- Check e-mail at set times, rather than letting each new message interrupt you.
- Set aside a time to retrieve voice mail and return calls.
- Keep a calendar of your deadlines and obligations.

Webinar Now Available:

Practicing Gratitude to Boost Your Happiness

Gratitude is the extremely powerful quality of being thankful that can change your life for the better. If you're looking to bring more happiness into your life, then practicing gratitude is your answer. Gratitude opens your heart and your mind allowing you to feel more present, generous, thankful, empathetic, kind, patient, positive and more aware of the beauty that surrounds you.



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Family Caregivers Month

National Family Caregiver Month is observed every November in the United States. During this month, we honor and recognize the vital role of family caregivers who provide around-the-clock support for their loved ones in need. According to the National Council on Aging, family members are often the primary source of support for older adults and people with disabilities. More than 53 million family caregivers provide unpaid care.

Caring for a loved one can strain even the most resilient people. If you're a caregiver, take steps to preserve your own health and wellbeing. The demands of caregiving may also cause emotional and physical stress. It's common to feel angry, frustrated, worn out, or sad. And it's common to feel alone.

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't see how caregiving affects your own health and wellbeing. Caregiver stress can put caregivers at risk of changes in their own health. Signs may include worry, tiredness, weight loss or gain, irritability, sadness, headaches, or missing your own medical appointments.

Mayo Clinic offers these tips to manage caregiver stress:

- **Ask for and accept help.** Make a list of ways in which others can help you.
- **Focus on what you can do.** Believe that you're doing the best you can.
- **Set goals you can reach.** Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time.
- **Get connected.** Learn about caregiving resources in your area.
- **Join a support group.** They can cheer you on and help you solve problems.
- **Seek social support.** Stay connected to family and friends who support you.
- **Take care of your health.** Find ways to sleep better. Move your body in ways that you enjoy most days. Eat a healthy diet. Drink plenty of water.
- **See your health care professional.** Talk about worries or symptoms you have.

Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/caregiver-stress/art-20044784>



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Prioritizing Family Time and 'Me Time' During the Holiday Rush

The holiday season is often filled with commitments, events, and long to-do lists, making it easy to lose sight of personal wellbeing and family connections. Amid the busyness, it's essential to carve out time for yourself and your loved ones to avoid burnout and stay grounded. Here are some strategies to help you balance it all:

Set Boundaries: Be selective with your social calendar. It's okay to say "no" to events or activities that don't align with your priorities. Decide which events are most important and gracefully decline others. Protecting your time allows you to focus on what matters most—quality time with family and self-care.

Create Family Traditions: Engaging in activities that bring joy and connection, such as baking cookies, decorating the house, or hosting a game night, strengthens family bonds. Traditions not only bring warmth and fun to the holidays but also create lasting memories.

Schedule 'Me Time': Block out time for yourself in the same way you would for any important event. Whether it's reading, exercising, or enjoying a quiet cup of coffee, personal time allows you to recharge, making you more present and engaged when spending time with others.

Unplug Regularly: Technology can be a huge distraction, even during family gatherings. Designate tech-free zones or times, especially during meals or family activities, to ensure deeper connections and more meaningful interactions.

Practice Mindful Presence: With so much going on, it's easy to feel distracted. Try to be fully present during family moments. Put away devices, reduce multitasking, and immerse yourself in conversations and activities with your loved ones.

Delegate Tasks: Don't try to take on everything yourself. Involve family members in holiday planning, from meal prep to decorating, to lessen your load and turn chores into opportunities for bonding.

By being intentional with your time and energy, you can create a holiday season that is joyful and rejuvenating. Taking time for yourself and your family will not only help you recharge but also strengthen the relationships that matter most. Prioritizing what truly brings joy during the holidays can make the season more meaningful for everyone involved.

Source: <https://discoverhappyhabits.com/holiday-self-care/>



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The Gift of Gratitude: Finding Meaning Amid the Holiday Hustle

The holiday season often brings stress and busyness, but it's also the perfect time to pause and reflect on the things we're grateful for. Practicing gratitude has been shown to improve mental health, strengthen relationships, and boost overall well-being. During the holidays, it can be especially valuable to focus on gratitude, as it helps us stay centered amidst the hustle and bustle. One simple way to practice gratitude is by keeping a daily journal. Writing down three things you're thankful for each day, whether big or small, can shift your mindset towards positivity. Expressing gratitude verbally, whether through a heartfelt thank-you to a friend, family member, or colleague or even writing a note of appreciation, strengthens connections and spreads joy.

Gratitude can also be practiced through giving back. Volunteering or donating to causes close to your heart allows you to appreciate your own blessings while contributing to others' well-being. Even small acts of kindness, like paying it forward or helping a neighbor, can instill a sense of purpose and community spirit. Beyond personal benefits, research shows that gratitude boosts resilience, especially during stressful or hectic times like the holidays. It helps us stay grounded and brings focus back to what matters most—relationships, health, and community. Gratitude can also shift the focus away from materialism and the pressures of gift-giving, which often overwhelm the holiday season.

Incorporating gratitude into your holiday routine enhances your happiness and promotes a spirit of generosity and kindness throughout your community. Studies have shown that practicing gratitude regularly can increase empathy and reduce aggression, creating a ripple effect of positivity. So, take a moment this season to reflect on what truly matters, share your appreciation with those around you, and inspire others to do the same. When gratitude becomes a daily habit, it can transform how you experience the holiday season, making it more meaningful and joyful for everyone involved.

Source: <https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-gratitude/>

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Crunch Bar-Inspired Energy Balls

Ingredients

- 11 ounces pitted dates (about 2 cups)
- 2½ cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- ½ cup unsalted unsweetened cashew butter
- ⅓ cup reduced-fat plain (Greek-style) yogurt
- 1 (3.9-ounce) package chocolate instant pudding mix
- 4 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups puffed brown rice cereal
- 4 tablespoons dark chocolate chips

Directions

1. Place 2 cups dates in a medium heatproof bowl; cover with boiling water. Let stand until softened, about 10 minutes. Drain well.
2. Pulse the drained dates in a food processor until coarsely chopped. Add 2½ cups oats, ½ cup cashew butter, ⅓ cup yogurt, 1 (3.9-ounce) package pudding mix, 4 teaspoons vanilla and ½ teaspoon salt; process until a thick paste forms and the oats are chopped into small pieces. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl; gently fold in 2 cups puffed rice by hand until evenly combined.
3. Roll about 1 tablespoon date mixture into a ball; place on parchment-paper-lined baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining date mixture.
4. Microwave 4 tablespoons chocolate chips in a small bowl on High in 30-second intervals, stirring between each interval, until melted. Spoon the chocolate into a small zip-top plastic bag; cut a ¼-inch hole in the corner. Drizzle the balls with the melted chocolate; garnish with puffed rice, if desired. Refrigerate, uncovered, until the chocolate is set, about 5 minutes.

Nutrition

Per Serving: 3 Balls

**Calories: 161 | Protein: 4g | Carbohydrates: 26g | Dietary Fiber: 3g | Saturated Fat: 2g
| Total Sugars: 12g | Sodium: 109mg | Cholesterol: 1g**

Source: <https://www.eatingwell.com/crunch-bar-inspired-energy-balls-8683274>

Guard Your Emotional Well-being as a Caregiver

If you're a caregiver for a loved one, physical exhaustion may be a concern, but are you overlooking the importance of your emotional well-being? Your primary focus is often on physical tasks like feeding, bathing, and medical care, which can create a sense of "caregiver tunnel vision," where the emotional toll on you is easily overlooked. To prevent burnout and maintain your health, reach out to your employee assistance program for guidance on managing stress and staying at your best for those you love. Some symptoms of burnout you might experience include detachment, feeling indifferent or unable to emotionally connect, or feeling like you are just going through the motions of meeting the needs of your loved one. You may feel trapped, helpless, or overwhelmed by the demands of caregiving. These emotions are normal, but it's important to recognize them early. The key is to avoid reaching a point of emotional exhaustion where you lose the desire to care for your loved one—an unfortunate possible outcome of one of life's most challenging and rewarding roles. Seek support when you need it, and remember that taking care of yourself is also a way of taking care of your loved one.

Stress Tips from the Field: The Magic of "Me-Time"

"Me-time" is that period you set aside for yourself to experience relaxation and personal fulfillment—stress management, exercise, meditation, or nothing at all. Me-time requires detaching from stressors and responsibilities so you can recharge. Don't let me-time happen by chance during a lull in your schedule. Instead, make it a regular part of your day or week. It can reduce stress, prevent burnout, and give you a boost, knowing that something enjoyable, fun, fulfilling, and uplifting—just for you—is soon at hand. This stress management technique is called "anticipatory coping" or "positive anticipation." A near-future enjoyable activity becomes stress relief by giving you something to look forward to. This delivers emotional relief and motivation in the present to help you tolerate current stress more easily.

Diversity and Inclusion Tips: Recognize Your Unconscious Bias

Enhance your workplace environment by becoming aware of your "unconscious biases." These biases are automatic assumptions or judgments we make about others, often influenced by past experiences, stereotypes, or beliefs we've absorbed over time. Recognizing them can lead to a more inclusive and positive workplace. It can be difficult to recognize your own biases because they are often automatic and subconscious. However, there are four common workplace interactions where you're more likely to notice biased thoughts or actions as they happen: 1) When listening to a coworker, are you assigning less or more value to their input or comments based on differences? 2) When organizing a social gathering, are you avoiding including those who differ from what is dominant in your group—or if they are included, do you feel awkward and less genuine and authentic in your social interactions? 3) When giving feedback to a coworker or team member, do you offer more constructive praise or less constructive praise based on differences? 4) When working with others, do you form a team or workgroup with those who are more like you?

Get More Rejuvenated on Your Vacation

Don't undermine your ability to rejuvenate and revitalize yourself when you go on vacation. View a vacation as a type of necessary therapy rather than strictly a recreational event, and as something that can improve your well-being, functioning, and quality of life. Avoid these pitfalls that reduce a vacation's positive impact: 1) Feeling guilty about being away and unable to relax unless you "check in." 2) Not planning a "bridge day" to ease back into the fray. (Use this time to take care of personal and family needs before jumping back into work.) 3) Not taking long enough vacations. To experience true detachment, you need more than an extended weekend. 4) Staying "plugged in" by routinely engaging with decisions back at the office. 5) Feeling anxious when leaving, because you did not plan well for being away and letting go.

Will Exercising More Add Years to Your Life?

Many people have wondered, “How much longer will I live by exercising the recommended weekly amount of time?” The 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends “adults do at least 150 minutes to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes to 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.” A recent study examined the exercise practices of 116,000 adults, with participants answering survey questions 15 times over the course of 30 years. Results: You may reduce your risk of mortality due to any cause by 35%-42% if you engage in both vigorous- and moderate-intensity exercise combined, which would be 300-450 minutes per week. However, with the recommended 150-300 minutes of moderate exercise, mortality risk would be reduced by 22%-31%. Always seek guidance from your doctor prior to beginning an exercise program. Source: www.ama-assn.org [search “massive study uncovers”]

Intervening in Parental Burnout

Just like workplace burnout, parental burnout is a state of chronic physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. However, its cause stems from the relentless demands of parenting. Mid-fall, when home, work, school, and community activities pull in all directions, it can feel nearly impossible to catch your breath. Parental burnout can manifest as feelings of emotional detachment from your children, going through daily routines on autopilot, increased irritability, or a sense of inadequacy, as if you’re falling short of being the parent you want to be. You also might find it more difficult to join in your interactions with children. Talk to your EAP about burnout and taking control of a downward spiral, and discover solutions you can use now and in the future.

Nix Procrastination with the Five-Minute Rule

The “five-minute rule” is a tool to help you stop procrastinating and act on a task that you have been postponing. The idea is to take just five minutes to start a task or make progress on a decision. By setting a small, manageable time limit, you reduce the overwhelming feeling that often comes with larger tasks or choices. In effect, you are breaking a deadlock with yourself. Once you start on the task, you might just continue past the five minutes. The five-minute rule can be used either for small decisions or for big ones that are prone to “decision neglect,” which is a more serious form of procrastination of things like starting a will or seeing a doctor for a serious symptom or a medical condition.

Sneak Exercises into Your Workday

A desk, a chair, the stairs, and waiting time can be your best friends for sneaking exercise into your day. Here’s how: 1) Take the stairs instead of the elevator to boost your heart rate and strengthen your legs. 2) Do periodic squats in front of your desk. 3) Strengthen your arms by doing “chair pushups.” 4) Set a timer for quick five-minute walks several times a day, which is also a great drowsiness zapper and focus improver. 5) Try a walking meeting vs. the conference room. These five exercises add up, won’t interrupt your workflow, and may improve productivity. Check out this chair exercise video link, and start combating the effects of sitting too much. Source: <https://ymcanyc.org> [search “chair exercises”]

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