

Family and Community Health “Connections” in Mason County

DON'T ALLOW STRESS TO SAP YOUR HOLIDAY JOY

While the holidays are a time of joy and sharing, they can also be a time of significant physical and mental stress.

Managing holiday stress requires setting priorities as well as avoiding or reducing as many stressors as possible. Texas A&M

AgriLife experts have some tips to make your holidays a little merrier through prioritizing, planning and having realistic expectations.

Typical holiday stressors and demands

Holiday stressors can include strained finances, increased social obligations, ongoing or renewed family conflicts, new or added work demands, travel planning, time management and trying to meet some heightened expectations of oneself or others, said Lakshmi Mahadevan, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service specialist in mental health and well-being in the agency's Family and Community Health unit, Bryan-College Station.

"Additionally, the pandemic has led to or exacerbated health and safety concerns when in group settings and increased the difficulty with managing expenses due to economic downturns," she said. "It has also maximized social isolation and loneliness, plus added the dread of being reminded of a loss by seeing an empty chair at the holiday dinner table."

There are a variety of stressors that can potentially take the joy out of the holidays.

Mahadevan said financial and time stress are two major stressors during the holidays. Planning holiday budgets and sticking to limits can help reduce overspending and reduce any associated stress.

"To help alleviate financial stress, make a comprehensive list that includes gifts, shipping expenses, entertainment, additional food and drinks, travel funds and clothing for yourself and/or family," she said. "Budget ahead and prepare for additional expenses. Be flexible to changes in plans and adjust expenses as needed."

To avoid additional costs, she suggested using cash or a debit

card, whenever possible, instead of a credit card. And if the family budget is tighter this year, you might consider involving the family in creating hand-made gifts for loved ones, providing an opportunity for you to spend quality time together and to save some money.

"You might also consider collecting any unused gift cards of yours and using them as gifts, or allocating funds to a prepaid gift card and using that for holiday purchases," she said.

To help with time management, Mahadevan suggested using an electronic or paper calendar to mark visits and events, blocking out separate times and dates for holiday preparations, shopping, decorating, cooking and socializing.

"You also should plan any travel well in advance, including booking flights, accommodations and any tours or activities," she said. "And remember that disruptions are always possible, so reduce stress by deliberately adding self-care to your schedule. Periodically review your schedule and be sure to note when a task is accomplished."

She said it is also important to avoid holiday tasks or perceived obligations that will likely cause stress.

"Learn to say 'no,' and prioritize your time for what truly matters to you," she said. "The important thing is to spend quality time with family and friends and build lasting memories."

Stress and holiday overeating

Sticking to diet, exercise and sleep routines is important for avoiding post-holiday stress or creating unhealthy habits, she said.

"Many people find themselves overeating during the holidays because busy schedules and the stress that comes along with those can lead people to overeat or eat things they normally wouldn't eat," said Chad Rethorst, Ph.D., a Department of Nutrition associate professor in Texas A&M's Institute for Advancing Health Through Agriculture, Bryan-College Station. Some suggestions he made included:

— Be mindful of what and when you eat. If you find yourself tempted to

eat, ask yourself if you are really hungry or are eating for another reason. Cravings often associated with emotional states like sadness or being anxious often occur when you are not actually hungry, so it's important to understand what's causing those cravings.

— Stick to your routines. Maintaining your normal sleep and exercise routines can help prepare you to deal with stress.

— Plan ahead to make better food choices. Looking at a restaurant menu in advance and deciding what to order before you go can help you make healthy choices.

Similarly, thinking about possible future scenarios may help you anticipate a stressful situation and plan to deal with it.

— Find positive ways to deal with stress. Feeling stressed is normal, so it's important to find ways to help yourself deal with that stress. Going for a walk, finding time to be alone or talking with a friend can help relieve stress.

AgriLife Extension also has tips on how to alter traditional holiday recipes to make them healthier. The agency also offers "Eating Well for Healthy Living," an online course in which participants learn to help reduce stress through meal planning and physical activity. It also shows how to spend less and get more from the grocery store, as well as safely store and prepare foods.

Other tips for managing holiday stress

Miquela Smith, MPH, AgriLife Extension public health program specialist, Lubbock, said it is important to keep expectations realistic during the holidays. Smith supports AgriLife Extension's Family and Community Health unit efforts statewide with her mental health expertise.

"Basing expectations or experiences on what we see on social media or in the lives of others can cause stress," Smith said. "We can cause ourselves undue pressure to create share-worthy memories rather than enjoying the time with loved ones." She said it is important to focus on the positive experiences associated with the holidays and not be concerned with what other people are doing and what you might be missing.

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"Something else that can help if you begin to feel overwhelmed during the holidays is recognizing what things are in your control versus what things are not," Smith said. "This perspective can be valuable during the holidays when we are unable to keep to normal schedules and routines."

Smith shared some additional tips and recommendations for managing holiday stress and feelings of sadness, including:

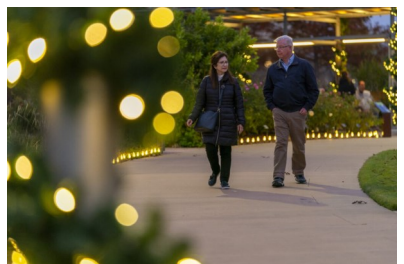
— Acknowledge to yourself that it's OK to feel unhappy.

— Reach out to others for support and companionship.

— Avoid excessive eating and drinking.

— Incorporate regular physical activity into your holiday routine. "Some people also reduce stress through mindfulness activities such as meditation or yoga," Smith said. "Others may get a psychological benefit from doing something to help others during the holidays, such as volunteering to deliver meals. Try to find something to do that will make you feel more relaxed and promote your emotional well-being."

Source: <https://agrillifeto-day.tamu.edu/2023/12/11/dont-allow-stress-to-sap-your-holiday-joy/>



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National Soup Month



When the cold weather is in abundance, what better time to sit down and warm up with a nice, warm bowl of soup? Where did soup come from, and how was it created? Let's find out as we dive into the history of National Soup Month!

The soul-warming history of National Soup Month

Historical evidence of the existence of soup dates all the way back to about 20,000 B.C. Boiling was not a common cooking technique until the invention of a waterproof container, which started out as clay vessels. Animal Hides and watertight baskets were used along with heated rocks. The word soup itself derives from the French word *soupe* which means soup or broth. The word restaurant was first used in France, around the 16th century, to refer to a highly concentrated, inexpensive soup, sold by street vendors, that was advertised as an antidote to physical exhaustion. In 1765, a Parisian entrepreneur opened a shop specializing in such soups. This prompted the use of the modern word restaurant for eating establishments. In the U.S., the first colonial cookbook was published by William Parks in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1742, based on Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife; or Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, and it included several recipes for soups and bisques. A 1772 cookbook titled *The Frugal Housewife*, had an entire chapter around the entire subject of soups. In 1897, Doctor John T. Dorrance, a chemist with the Campbell Soup Company invented condensed soup, which has grown exponentially in popularity in the modern era. Condensing soup allows soup to be packaged into a smaller can and sold at a lower price than other canned soups. The soup is usually doubled in volume by adding a "can full" of water or milk (about 10 ounces). Since the 1990s, the canned soup market has burgeoned with soups marketed as "ready-to-eat," which require no additional liquid to prepare. Microwaveable bowls have expanded the ready-to-eat canned soup market even more, offering convenience (especially in workplaces) in preparing these popular lunch items.

How to celebrate National Soup Month

To celebrate, we could all make soup with our families at home and stay warm while we eat the soul-warming liquid that we all

know and love. Here's a recipe for Slow Cooker Chicken Taco Soup.

Ingredients

- 1 chopped onion
- 1 can of chili beans
- 1 can of black beans
- 1 can of whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 can of tomato sauce
- 1 can or bottle of beer
- 2 cans of diced tomatoes with green chili.
- 1 packet of taco seasoning
- 3 whole skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- 1 package of shredded cheddar cheese
- Sour cream (optional)
- Crushed tortilla chips (Optional)

Directions:

Place the onion, chili beans, black beans, corn, tomato sauce, beer, and diced tomatoes in a slow cooker. Add taco seasoning, and stir to blend. Lay chicken breasts on top of the mixture, pressing down slightly until just covered by the other ingredients. Set slow cooker for low heat, cover, and cook for 5 hours. Remove chicken breasts from the soup, and allow to cool long enough to be handled. Stir the shredded chicken back into the soup, and continue cooking for 2 hours. Serve topped with shredded cheddar cheese, a dollop of sour cream, and crushed tortilla chips, if desired.



Source:

<https://www.daysoftheyear.com/days/soup-month/>

Fun Hobbies to Pick up for National Hobby Month in January



The New Year is upon us, which usually means making New Year's resolutions that are hard to keep. Instead of making resolutions, try to pick up a new hobby this January! January is National Hobby Month, which gives you a great reason to pick up a hobby that has peaked your interest that you can do throughout the year. Check out some of these fun hobbies to try out in the New Year!

Knitting

Looking for a relaxing hobby that you can pick up at any time? Then, knitting might be the perfect hobby for you. This fun activity will help you keep your hands busy while you're sitting around relaxing, watching TV, or have some free time on your hands. Also, the constant repetition is soothing and easy to pick up!

Reading

If you are looking for a hobby that will help you grow, you should try to pick up reading! Whether you purchase the latest best seller to read on your own or you join a book club, reading is a great activity to help you learn and grow. For best practice, set a pace or a set number of books you want to read throughout the year and start from there. Whether you end up meeting your goal or going above and beyond, you've picked up a great hobby that will keep you entertained!

Learn to Play an Instrument

Have you always wanted to learn how to play a certain instrument? Then make 2024 is the time to learn it. Learning how to play an instrument can be a great hobby and pastime for you to enjoy. The best part about this hobby is that you can get the whole family involved if another member shows interest!

Take a Weekly Class

There are tons of different classes that you can take if you are looking for a new hobby to pick up. From pottery classes to yoga classes, there is bound to be something that peaks your interest in the New Year. Do some research and

figure out what you want to learn and don't be afraid to sign up! Also, ask any friends or family if they would be interested too. You are bound to have more fun during class, if you have another friend to join you.

Join a Club or Team

Just like a weekly class, you could potentially join a club or team sport that you can participate in weekly. There is a range of options to choose from, so pick something you have always wanted to try and give it a go! From tennis to indoor sports, there is bound to be something that you'll enjoy.

Cooking/Baking

Not only is this hobby fun, but it's delicious as well! Yes, you might already cook every day, however, taking time to try out different recipes is a great new hobby. Or if you would prefer, there are also cooking classes you can take to learn new skills. Either way, cooking and baking can be a great hobby for you and the whole family to enjoy.

Start a Passion Project

If you've had a certain idea that you've been thinking about then make your passion project a reality by taking it up as a hobby. There's nothing better than seeing an idea come to fruition, especially one that you are passionate about. So do yourself a favor and get started on your new hobby!

Source:
<https://www.juddbuilders.com/juddbuildersblog/2018/12/19/fun-hobbies-to-pick-up-for-national-hobby-month-in-january/>



Courtney Parrott, Brown County
Kailey Roberts, Burnet County
Milissa Wright, Concho Valley
Chanie Schaffner, Coleman County
Kelli Maberry, Jones County
Karen DeZarn, Lampasas County
Whitney Whitworth, Llano County
Carrie Ross, McCulloch County
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Kandice Everitt, Runnels County
McKinley Armstrong, San Saba County
Kim Miles, Taylor County
Courtney Redman, Tom Green County
Lorena Iverson BLT Regional Project Specialist
Stacy Drury, D7 Regional FCH Program Leader

Beefy Sausage Zucchini Bake

Ingredients:

1/2 pound extra lean ground beef
1/2 pound ground pork sausage
1 medium onion chopped
Pepper to taste
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
6 ounces unsalted tomato paste
2 cans diced tomatoes Italian style, 15.5 ounce
4 cups sliced zucchini, about four small zucchini
1/4 cup grated or shredded Parmesan cheese

Directions:

In a skillet, brown beef, pork, and onion. Drain if needed.

Add seasonings, tomato paste and canned tomatoes.

Simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in zucchini.

Transfer mixture into a greased 9 x 13 pan.

Bake at 350° for 20-25 minutes or until bubbly.

Remove from oven and sprinkle with grated parmesan.



Nutrition Facts	
6 servings per container	
Serving size	(355g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	210
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 9g	12%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 55mg	18%
Sodium 310mg	13%
Total Carbohydrate 15g	5%
Dietary Fiber 3g	11%
Total Sugars 9g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 17g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 85mg	8%
Iron 3mg	15%
Potassium 953mg	20%

*The % Daily Value tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.