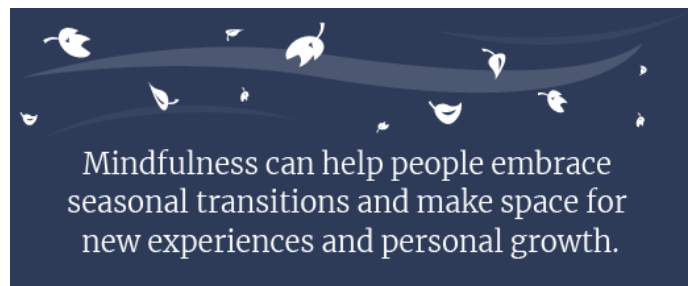




Shamong Township Schools

Renew Your Mindfulness & Gratitude

The changing seasons can help you prioritize your physical, emotional, and [mental health](#) by starting new routines or cutting out unhealthy habits. As we anticipate a new year, now is a time to embrace the concept of mindfulness—being fully present in the moment.



Winter is a season of transition, making it a good time for building resilience and practicing mindfulness. Trees are shedding their leaves and the days are shorter; this natural process may mirror our personal lives, where change is inevitable. Consider working with the energy of the season to amplify mindfulness practices:

- **Start each day with an intention.** People often set goals and intentions at the new year, making winter the perfect time to refocus your time and energy. Setting intentions can help align your values with your purpose.
- **Keep a gratitude journal.** Make a daily habit of noting what you're grateful for. Reflecting on

these moments of gratitude can help you appreciate the season more deeply.

- **Practice meditation.** Take a moment each day to meditate and practice deep breathing. This can help you stay grounded and calm throughout the busy holidays and into the new year.
- **Take a nature walk.** Take hikes or leisurely walks through parks, forests, or your neighborhood to soak in the beauty of the season. Instead of listening to music or a podcast, try a "quiet walk" and leave your phone at home, or set the volume to silent to stay focused on the moment.
- **Go photowalking.** Alternatively, take your phone or camera along during a nature walk to capture the season's sights. Not only will you get movement in, but you can also unleash your creativity and connect with your surroundings.

As with any exercise, practice builds mindfulness, so find ways to incorporate these activities into your routine. Sign into your online account to find more resources and guidance: [aetna.com](https://www.aetna.com) / [horizonblue.com](https://www.horizonblue.com).

Reminder: any deductibles/out-of-pocket maximums that may apply to your plans will renew January 1, 2025. If you've been putting off any doctor visits/services, try to squeeze them in before the year ends! Find plan info at shamongschools.org / District / Staff Resources / Benefits / Employee Benefits Online.


Give Your Favorite Recipes a Healthy Makeover

Food is part of holiday traditions, and your family may look forward to certain recipes. Luckily, there are some ways to make your favorite recipes a bit healthier. Consider these ways to transform your holiday recipes:


- **Fat**—When baking, use half the butter or oil and replace the other half with unsweetened applesauce, mashed banana, or Greek yogurt.
- **Salt**—Gradually cut back salt to see if you can taste the difference. You can reduce salt by half if baked goods don't require yeast.
- **Sugar**—Reduce the amount of sugar by one-third to one-half. Instead, add spices like cinnamon, cloves, allspice and nutmeg, or vanilla or almond extract to boost sweetness.

Healthy swaps can also increase the nutritional value of your classics. Get creative and experiment with other ways of creating healthy recipes for your most beloved holiday traditions.


Sugar Substitutes



Stevia—Swap out 1 cup of sugar for 1 teaspoon of stevia.



Honey—Add in a quarter of the amount of sugar listed.



Coconut sugar—Use an unrefined sugar cup for cup.

Study Reveals Two Key Aging Points

The body undergoes numerous changes—externally and internally—as people age. While it's traditionally believed that humans age gradually, research from the Stanford University School of Medicine revealed that people age in two significant “bursts” during their lives. Researchers found that humans undergo major changes in their bodies' molecules and microorganisms around ages 44 and 60.

These changes potentially impact several aspects of a person's health. For those in their 40s, researchers found significant molecular changes related to alcohol, caffeine, and lipid metabolism; cardiovascular disease; and skin and muscle. At 60, the largest molecule changes were associated with cardiovascular disease, immune regulation, kidney function, carbohydrate and caffeine metabolism, and skin and muscle. The study recommended lifestyle changes, such as exercising more and drinking less alcohol, when people near these key aging points in their 40s and 60s. [Talk to your doctor](#) to learn more.



Healthy Recipe Apple Cinnamon Bars

Makes: 24 servings

Ingredients

4 medium apples
1 cup flour
¼ tsp. salt
½ tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. cinnamon
½ cup brown sugar (packed)
1 cup oats (uncooked)
½ cup margarine or butter
Cooking spray

Preparations

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Put the flour, salt, baking soda, cinnamon, brown sugar, and oats in the mixing bowl. Stir together.
3. Add the margarine to the bowl. Using two knives, mix the ingredients and cut into crumbs.
4. Lightly grease the bottom and sides of the baking dish with cooking spray.
5. Spread half of the crumb mixture in the greased baking dish.
6. Remove the core from the apples and slice them. Put the apple slices into the baking dish.
7. Top the apples with the rest of the crumb mixture.
8. Bake in the oven for 40-45 minutes.
9. Cut into squares.

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Source: My Plate

Total calories	82
Total fat	4 g
Protein	1 g
Sodium	53 mg
Carbohydrate	12 g
Dietary fiber	1 g
Saturated fat	1 g
Total sugars	7 g