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Wellness Matters

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Your Wellness Journey Emotional Well-being *During the* Holidays

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

As holiday celebrations pick up, consider the following tips to help prioritize your emotional well-being:

- **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 both 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.

It's essential to stay in tune with your feelings and care for yourself. 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 Helpline at 800-662-HELP (4357).

Substance Abuse and
Mental Health Service
Administration

National Hotline:
(800) 662-HELP (4357)
[samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)

Walk to Lower Your Risk of Chronic Disease

You likely already know that walking is good for your health, but how much do you need to walk daily to produce health benefits? You've also probably heard that a 10,000 steps-per-day goal is good for you. However, that number originated from a Japanese marketing campaign rather than health research.

A new study from Vanderbilt University Medical Center explored how many daily steps a person should take to promote good health. The research studied fitness trackers and revealed that walking 8,200 steps a day was the threshold at which a person begins to significantly lower their risk of developing various chronic diseases. Specific chronic conditions noted included obesity, sleep apnea, gastroesophageal reflux disease, major depressive disorder, diabetes, and high blood pressure. The study also concluded that walking more steps than the threshold continues to increase the proven benefits of walking.

Take precautions to make sure you are safe while walking outside:

- Always walk on sidewalks (or on the left side of the street facing traffic if there are no sidewalks).
- Be aware of traffic.



- Carry identification and your cellphone in case of emergencies.
- In the evening hours, wear reflective gear and/or carry a flashlight in front of you.

Sweet Alternatives

Using less sugar doesn't mean you have to compromise on the taste of your holiday classics. Consider the following 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.

Healthy & Nutritious Healthier Recipe Makeovers

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

Consider the following tips to transform your holiday recipes:

Fat—For baked goods, use half the butter or oil and replace the other half with unsweetened applesauce, mashed banana, or Greek yogurt.

Salt—Gradually cut back the 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 flavorings such as 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.