



EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING A HOLIDAY GAME PLAN



To experience more joy and less stress this holiday season, it helps to develop a game plan now. We highly recommend taking a whole health approach, which recognizes the importance of nurturing and strengthening yourself first.

Being strong and healthy can help you find more joy during the season while preventing the stresses and challenges from wearing you down. Here are some strategies that can help thrive in the months ahead:

1. Prioritize your mental health

You are likely to get busy with more events, celebrations, and family gatherings. To protect yourself against stress, anxiety, and burnout, remember the importance of boundaries and scaling back when you need to. It's also important to be proactive in reducing stress and clearing your mind. Instead of dwelling on thoughts, consider sharing them with a trusted friend or family member and looking for new solutions.

2. Nurture your physical health

Holiday gatherings and colder weather can make it difficult to stick with healthy meal planning and exercise routines. Do what you can regarding healthy eating and exercise routines—and getting adequate sleep and water. These basic tips can help you feel strong, energized, and positive.

3. Cultivate your emotional well-being

The holidays can stir up a mix of emotions, including joy, nostalgia, or even grief. Be sure to acknowledge your emotions, especially if you feel sad or overwhelmed. To lift your spirits, try to prioritize quality time and authentic relationships, whether it's with family, friends, or colleagues.

4. Maintain your financial well-being

Gift-giving, travel, and social events can add financial pressure. Plan proactively by creating a budget to help you avoid overspending. It's helpful to prioritize shared experiences and time together over material things.

5. Strengthen your inner well-being

Whether it's through religious practices, rituals, or personal reflection, try to carve out quiet time. These moments of stillness can bring a sense of calm, clarity, and peace.

Remember, your Employee Assistance Program is also here to help. Services are free, confidential, and available to you and your family members.



TIPS FOR MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS AND EXPECTATIONS

By Michelle Dawes, Wellness Coordinator and Account Manager

The holiday season is around the corner and many people are already experiencing mixed emotions and additional stress. The picture-perfect holidays we see in commercials and movies can cause us to have unrealistic expectations of ourselves and others. When real life doesn't match up, we're likely to feel disappointed, burned out, and fatigued.

Here are a few tips that can help you enjoy what's most important this holiday season:

1. Stick to a healthy diet and regular physical activity.

As a health and wellness coach, of course, I would say that. However, with all the holiday events to attend, gifts to buy, and food to prepare, these healthy routines are often the first to go, which can negatively impact your physical, mental, and emotional health.

To maintain your well-being throughout the holidays, make a plan to maintain good nutrition and physical activity before the season begins. Define what this will look like for you and give yourself some grace if you fall short.

The colder weather and shorter daylight hours can trigger "winter onset depression." People with this condition often crave more sugar because it can have an immediate mood-boosting effect. Over time, too much sugar can lead to weight gain, systemic inflammation, and increased depressive symptoms. If you struggle to get back on track, reach out for support.

2. Plan a budget and focus on time together.

Most of us are feeling a financial pinch this year. But instead of focusing on the factors you cannot control, focus on what you can control. Decide with your family what your priorities will be and commit to a budget. Consider a family gift exchange, limiting the number of gifts you buy, or making gifts. Be intentional about enjoying all the seemingly "small" moments. Laughter and gratitude can be excellent medicine for combatting stress and truly enjoying the season.

3. Be honest with yourself and set boundaries.

The holidays can be emotionally challenging, especially for those who are missing a loved one. Acknowledge your feelings and know that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. Talk to someone about how you're feeling, whether that's a friend or family member, a community or faith group, or a professional.

Also, consider reaching out to someone who may be lonely. Volunteering and performing acts of kindness help cultivate joy and fulfillment for yourself and others.

Finally, it's also OK to set boundaries with difficult family members. Can you limit the amount of time you spend with those members? Lean on your past experiences to know what a healthy limit is for you and then plan accordingly.

As families grow and change, so do holiday traditions. Grieve your losses and be intentional about prioritizing your self-care throughout the season. Also, keep in mind your Employee Assistance Program can provide confidential support.

6 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL WELL-BEING



By Danielle Terpstra, MS, EP-C, Wellness Consultant, AllOne Health

One dimension of wellness that has been largely neglected in our digital era is social wellness. The powerful impact of healthy relationships on our health is well-supported in the literature. In fact, research has shown the health risks of social isolation to be comparable to those of obesity, high blood pressure, and smoking cigarettes.

If social isolation is so harmful, how can social connection impact health? The evidence suggests people who have healthy relationships and strong social networks respond better to stress. As a result, the endocrine, cardiovascular, and immune systems function better. With improvements in each system, people experience better cognitive functioning, reduced anxiety, improved energy, and a better chance at fighting off sickness.

There are many ways to improve your social well-being, and intentional work on it may be more important now than ever. Consider the following strategies:

1. Determine which relationship(s) in your life are most important to you and find one way you can nurture these relationships each week.
2. Prioritize honesty in your relationships. Speaking the truth in love holds a mutual benefit for you and your loved one.
3. Let go of comparison. It is said to be the thief of joy, and for good reason. Celebrate yourself and your loved ones and notice the impact it has on the health of your relationships.
4. Discover ways to be active with your loved ones. The “happy hormones” released when you are physically moving can be capitalized on to create a joyful social experience. Try group fitness classes, hikes, dances, or walking meetings.
5. Seek out ways to meet people who have shared interests. Volunteering, religious gatherings, dog parks (if you are a dog owner), and exercise groups are all great opportunities to meet people.
6. If you struggle with social anxiety and the above options sound daunting, consider talking with a professional to offer support. You might also consider support with natural remedies like aromatherapy, herbal support, cold water therapy, and breathwork.