

# Culture COUNTS

OCM BOCES

ocmboces.org

December 2022

## Mindfulness tips to de-stress during the holidays

*This article is from the John Hopkins Medicine website.*

**N**ot feeling particularly cheery this time of year? You're not alone. Many find that the holidays bring as much stress as they do joy. But there are ways to ease through the season. To help make the most of your festivities, Neda Gould, Ph.D., clinical psychologist and director of the Johns Hopkins Mindfulness Program at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, shares some mindful tips.

What is mindfulness? "Mindfulness is bringing your attention to the present moment with an element of non-judgment and acceptance. It is noticing when we get caught up in thoughts about the past or the future, and returning our attention to the present — the only reality," explains Gould.

While mindfulness can be a formal meditation practice, there are also informal ways to practice this skill. This can give us perspective and decrease stress.

Gould shares four ways to make your holidays brighter:

### 1. ACCEPT IMPERFECTION

Can good be good enough?

"As we gear up for the holidays, we often set the bar impossibly high for ourselves and then feel upset when our celebrations don't live up to expectations," says Gould.

"IT'S NOT HOW MUCH WE  
GIVE, IT'S HOW MUCH LOVE  
WE PUT INTO GIVING."

- MOTHER THERESA

Before you start preparing, acknowledge that things may not go exactly as planned. "It's OK if it's not perfect. Imperfection is healthy and normal. For some of us, it might just take a little practice," reminds Gould.

### 2. DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF WHAT COUNTS

With long lines and nasty traffic, the holidays can get hectic. When overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle, ask yourself:

- Where does this fit in the grand scheme of things? If you're frustrated by the long grocery line you're standing in, remember



### HOLIDAY KINDNESS:

From left to right: Innovation Tech students brighten up their entrance with a Christmas tree; Crossroads door-decor focuses on kindness; the Seven Valleys Interact Club rings up support for the Salvation Army Red Kettle Campaign



GET SOCIAL @ OCM BOCES



facebook.com/  
OCMBOCES



@ocm.boces



@OCMBOCES

## WELLNESS COUNTS

### Mindfulness tips to de-stress during the holidays

*Continued from Page 1*

that it is just a long grocery line — nothing more. Don't let it spoil your afternoon.

- Can I use this moment of frustration as an opportunity to reflect? While the cashier rings up the customers ahead of you, take inventory of the good things that have happened today or the things you are grateful for.
- Even if this moment seems stressful, can I find a way to make it pleasant? Connect with someone else in line with a compliment or kind gesture, or notice what's around you with fresh eyes and an open mind.

#### 3. RESPOND WITH KINDNESS

You can't change how others act during the stresses of the holiday season, but you can change how you respond to situations:

"Whenever I encounter a difficult person, I tell myself, 'this person is suffering, and that's why they're acting this way.' It softens my frustration, helps me be more compassionate and reminds me that it's not personal," says Gould.

Keep in mind that the holidays are especially difficult for those who are alone. See if you can extend an act of kindness to those you know are without family and friends during this time of year.

If things do get tense with someone, take a few deep breaths.

"Those few breaths can shift things and give you new perspective," says Gould.

#### 4. RETHINK YOUR RESOLUTIONS

"Typical New Year's resolutions set you up for failure," warns Gould. If you want to better yourself in the New Year, follow these tips for success:

Start small. Break your goal into tinier steps over the course of the year. If weight loss is your goal, it doesn't have to be drastic. Try to eat more veggies during your first month and gradually cut back on sweets throughout the next, suggests Gould.

Be kind to yourself. If you didn't achieve last year's resolution or stray from the path this time around, let it go. "We often contrive these stories ('I'm never going to quit smoking!') that only add to our distress," says Gould. "With practice, we can notice this self-critic, let go of that negativity and pick our goals back up without the guilt or shame."





## WELLNESS COUNTS

# Mobility should be a top priority for staying healthy

*This article is from Harvard Health Publishing at Harvard Medical School.*



It can't be emphasized enough: engaging in physical activity is the single most important thing you can do to maintain mobility and independence, no matter your age or your health status. It can help you control your weight. It's the key to keeping your muscles and bones strong, your joints working properly, your heart healthy, and your metabolism revved. The more you move, the better your strength and balance will be, and the less likely you will be to fall or lose the ability to perform basic daily functions. And that's on top of all the other health benefits of regular exercise, such as reduced risks of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. Exercise even has positive effects on mood and may help improve cognitive function.

In addition to doing targeted exercises for muscle strength and flexibility, joint health, and balance, you should strive to increase routine daily physical activities that aren't formal exercise, such as climbing stairs. If you're in pain, all this activity may seem impossible. But in many cases, exercise actually helps reduce the pain. If you have osteoarthritis, for example, regular exercise not only helps maintain joint function, but also helps relieve stiffness and diminishes pain and fatigue. Maintaining muscle strength can also help dampen stresses on joints.

### HOW MUCH EXERCISE DO YOU NEED EACH WEEK?

For healthy adults, the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommend 150 to 300 minutes of moderate exercise a week, with activity every day. The guidelines also recommend twice-weekly strength training sessions and balance exercises for older adults at risk of falling. Disability should not be a reason to refrain from all activity. The guidelines state: "When older adults cannot do 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week because of chronic conditions, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow." Even modest efforts count. "Move more and sit less throughout the day," the guidelines advise. "Some activity is better than none."

### JOY IS THE KEY

The key is finding activities you can do and enjoy. If your joints are the problem, don't try to "pace" your joints—let your joints pace you. For example, don't make yourself go jogging. Instead, pick low-impact activities, such as swimming or water aerobics. Try cycling on a stationary bike at the gym or at home. Yoga, tai chi, and qigong are other good alternatives. Even a gentle walking program that ramps up slowly will help. In other words, there's a lot of flexibility in the kinds of activities you do and when. Don't feel guilty if you can't do the same kinds of activities you used to. The important thing is not to let joint pain keep you from being physically active.

If you're in doubt about your ability to take on even a modest exercise program, we recommend filling out the [Get Active Questionnaire \(GAQ\)](#), a tool developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology to help people determine whether they should talk to a doctor before embarking on, or ramping up, an exercise program. Be sure to talk to your doctor about whether it's safe to exercise if any of the following apply:

- You've had hip or knee surgery or you've been experiencing pain in your hip, knee, foot and ankle, or back.
- You have a chronic or unstable health condition, such as heart disease, or you have a respiratory ailment, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, diabetes, or several risk factors for heart disease.

## WELLNESS COUNTS

### Wild Rice Stuffing with Apples & Sausage - a healthy Kwanzaa dish

*From Eating Well*

This amazing wild-rice stuffing recipe is bursting with rustic flavors, including rye bread, sausage, apples, dried cherries, pecans and fresh herbs. It is a popular healthy dish in Kwanzaa celebration.



#### INGREDIENTS

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 ¼ cups wild rice (8 ounces)                                      | 3 cups reduced-sodium chicken or turkey broth |
| 4 cups cubed Jewish rye bread (1/2-inch cubes), preferably day-old | 1 cup dried cherries                          |
| 1 pound sweet turkey sausage, casings removed                      | 1 cup coarsely chopped pecans                 |
| 2 cups chopped leeks, white and light green parts only             | 1 ½ tablespoons minced fresh marjoram         |
| 2 tart apples, cut into 1/4-inch dice                              | 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme                |
| 1 cup diced celery   | ¼ teaspoon salt                               |
|  | ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper              |

#### DIRECTIONS

##### Step 1

Preheat oven to 300 degrees F.

##### Step 2

Place rice in a medium saucepan and add enough water to cover by about 1 1/2 inches. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer, cover and cook until tender, about 1 hour. (Or prepare according to package directions.) Drain well.

##### Step 3

Meanwhile, spread bread on a baking sheet; bake, stirring once halfway through, until dry and crisp, about 25 minutes.

##### Step 4

Increase oven temperature to 425 degrees. Coat a 3- to 4-quart baking dish with cooking spray.

##### Step 5

About 15 minutes before the rice is done, cook sausage and leeks in a large skillet over medium heat, stirring and breaking up with a spoon, until the sausage is browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Add apples and celery; cook for 3 minutes more.

##### Step 6

Transfer the sausage mixture to a large bowl. Add the rice and bread, then stir in broth, cherries, pecans, marjoram, thyme, salt and pepper. Transfer to the prepared baking dish and cover tightly with foil.

##### Step 7

Bake the stuffing for 35 minutes. Uncover and bake until the top is browned, 15 to 20 minutes more.

#### TIPS

**Make Ahead Tip:** Prepare rice (Step 2), cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days; toast bread (Step 3), cover and store at room temperature for up to 2 days.

#### Nutrition Facts:

*Per 1-Cup Serving:* 291 calories; protein 12.9g; carbohydrates 39.8g; dietary fiber 4.7g; sugars 9.9g; fat 9.4g; saturated fat 1.3g; cholesterol 24.3mg; vitamin A 629.7IU; vitamin C 4.6mg; folate 69.9mcg; calcium 45.9mg; iron 2.2mg; magnesium 52.6mg; potassium 338.6mg; sodium 509.5mg; thiamin 0.2mg; added sugar 5g.

## CULTURE COUNTS



*New BOCES educators receive Restorative Practices training from Dan Hesler*

## Check-in circles show students we care about them

By Randi Downs

Every day is a good day for a check-in circle or two! All you will need is a talking piece and guidelines for your circle time. Here are some simple circle ideas for you to use to check in with your students.

This comes from an incredible book, [Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community](#). It is written by Carolyn Boys-Watson and Kay Pranis.

Be sure to share with your students that this type of circle provides an opportunity for them to let their community know what is going on for them or what is on their mind.

- Tell us about a high point and a low point in your life since our last check-in.
- Hold up your hand with fingers raised to reflect how you are feeling this morning. (5 fingers="Terrific-I am feeling great and am available to help out anyone", to 1 finger="I am struggling.")

- What are the roses and thorns in your life in the past week?
- What do others need to know about how you are feeling today?
- What is something you are looking forward to today or this week?
- What's really on your mind this morning?

Try some of these out in the next few weeks. They are even more important the busier we all get!

## Checking in on check-in circles

By Randi Downs

This month, our Restorative Practice turnkey trainers will be sharing ways staff can check in with students using circles. During the holiday season, it's more important than ever to keep students connected and grounded in community. Everyone's experience is different, but as educators, we can maintain consistency by using circles at the beginning, middle or end of each day.

[The blog in this link offers some terrific ideas that you can use as early as tomorrow.](#) One of my favorites is "Blobs and Lines" because it gets students up and moving right away. The teacher can determine the criteria for each blob or line. I use a "Salsa Line-up" and have participants line up in the

order of how spicy they like their food. It's quick and easy but allows students to talk with people they might not talk to on a regular basis.

Try one or more of these icebreaker check-ins this month! Be sure to think about the questions and choices that you put in front of students. It's important that topics are inclusive and responsive so that all students have access to the answers.

Have fun! You will be surprised what you can learn from these simple circles!