

3 Tips to Lessen Holiday Stress



The December holiday season can be stressful for almost anyone. For some, the thought of shopping for gifts and food and planning the holiday meal can be too much.

Here are a few tips to help you get through the season smoothly and happily:

- Consider devoting one day to shopping, whether you head to the mall first thing in the morning or set aside a chunk of time for online searching. Think about doing this early in December when the selection of gifts may be much better and to allow time for shipping items to distant friends and relatives.
- How you shop can be as important as what you buy. Perhaps you find a perfect item for a friend, but would also like to get it for a family member. If

those friends and family are not in the same social circle, it just might be the solution to get several items that are the same—in different colours, perhaps—and disperse them throughout your wider social network.

- Consider giving a treat to yourself during this busy time. It doesn't have to be an expensive gift for yourself—maybe it's a small box of high-quality chocolate, or a whimsical pair of socks. The point is to think of yourself every so often. Psychologist Alice Doma, director of the Mind/Body Center for Women's Health at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School, suggests setting a goal. For example, for every 10 presents, reward yourself with something just for you.

10 FAST FACTS

- 1 A commercially prepared chocolate muffin can have more than 50 grams of carbohydrates.**
- 2 Riboflavin keeps skin, eyes and nerves healthy and releases energy in cells.**
- 3 Milk is 87 percent water.** Protein, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals make up the other 13 percent.
- 4 Pumpkin seeds are high in zinc, which is good for the prostate and building the immune system.**
- 5 The mushroom is the only non-animal high natural source of vitamin D.**
- 6 A handful of almonds eaten every day can increase levels of good cholesterol.**
- 7 Oats provide the highest protein content of all the cereals.**
- 8 You will not find a nutrition facts table on coffee and tea because they contain so few nutrients.**
- 9 The first set of Canadian dietary guidelines was published in 1942.**
- 10 The consumption of ultra-processed food has increased more than any other food group since the 1980s.**

- 3 Staying on the Healthy Eating Track**
- 5 10-minute Climb Better Than Caffeine**
- 7 An Update on Blood Glucose Levels**

Always There: Carrots



Although various fruits and vegetables go in and out of style—think cauliflower pizza crust and avocado toast, for example—one tried and true, omnipresent and always good-for-you vegetable is carrots.

In Canada, carrots are at their peak in the fall season, but great quality, homegrown, nutrient and beta-carotene-rich carrots are abundant all year long. When craving a cold, crunchy snack, simply peel a carrot from the fridge and enjoy. A great source of fibre, they go with every kind of dip from dill or ranch to hummus and guacamole. Kids love carrots on a veggie platter. Carrots can be sliced in sticks, made super thin in julienne strips like shoestrings, cut into coins, sliced on an angle or with a crinkle cutter to keep

them interesting when eaten raw. They're a classic ingredient in winter soups and stews but are also versatile enough to be added to vegetable juice and even desserts like carrot cake, fruit cakes and puddings. They can be grated into a tomato pasta sauce to ramp up the vegetable content or lightly steamed or microwaved before serving raw for those who find a hard carrot a bit tough to chew or digest.

Extra large carrots work really well in a vegetable spiralizer to make low-carb noodles. These noodles can be eaten raw in salads or added to sandwiches. Briefly sautéing carrot noodles in a little sesame oil also makes a great side dish. For a twist on a salad that can be eaten warm or cold, try this recipe, courtesy of croplife.ca, an organization that promotes Canadian-grown food.

winter
recipe



Grilled Carrot and Avocado Salad with Maple Dijon Dressing

Serves: 4-6

Ingredients

Dressing

- ¼ cup maple syrup
- ¼ cup canola oil
- 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp chopped fresh thyme
- ½ tsp each salt and pepper

Salad

- 4 large carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch slices
- 1 Tbsp canola oil
- ½ tsp each salt and pepper
- 6 cups packed arugula, baby kale or spinach leaves
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced
- 2 sweet red peppers, seeded and thinly sliced
- 2 avocados, pitted and cubed
- ½ cup chopped toasted pecans

Instructions

Make dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients, set aside.

Make salad: In a medium bowl, toss carrots in oil, salt and pepper. Transfer carrots to a grill basket. Cook on grill over medium-high heat until slightly charred and tender, 20 to 25 minutes. (Alternately, carrots can also be roasted in a 400°F oven, turning halfway through cooking.) Toss cooked carrots in half the dressing. Let cool or serve warm.

In a large bowl, combine carrots with arugula (or mixed greens), green onions and peppers. Top salad with avocados and pecans and drizzle with remaining dressing.

I was a vegetarian until I started leaning toward the sunlight.

— Rita Rudner, comic

Staying on the **Healthy Eating Track**

Winter can be the time to easily put on a few pounds as we get the urge to stay inside and nest. But staying on track with healthy eating can be as simple as setting a few goals to stick to a healthier menu.

One goal is to focus on eating more fruit and vegetables. Winter is the perfect season for roasting root vegetables, such as potatoes, parsnips, carrots and beets. The fibre in produce also keeps the microbiome level—the collection of good bacteria—in balance, which may reduce the risk of autoimmune diseases, fight off pathogens and infections and even improve mood.

Studies show that eating more fruit and vegetables can help significantly reduce the risk for a number of chronic diseases, including high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity and cancer.

Trying to stay clear of refined products is yet another step toward healthier eating habits. Some products contain too many refined grains, additives,

preservatives, unhealthy fats and large amounts of added sugar and salt. Stick to grains in their most natural state such as quinoa, wild rice and oats. A claim of “whole grains” on products can be misleading: whole grains should always be the first ingredient listed and there should be little—if any—added sugar.

One final way to stick to healthier eating is to cut back on the amount of red meat that’s consumed. Research continues to suggest that reducing the consumption of red meat is healthier for us—and also for the planet. Switching to other sources for protein, such as beans, nuts and dairy can help fill the daily protein quota — about 56 grams daily for men and 46g for women.



Start Your Day on the **Right Track** with these **Foods** and **Drinks**

- **Eggs** are undeniably healthy and delicious. Studies have shown that eating eggs at breakfast increases feelings of fullness, reduces the caloric intake at the next meal and helps maintain steady blood sugar and insulin levels.
- **Greek yogurt** is made by straining whey and other liquid from the milk curds, which produces a creamier yogurt that is more concentrated in protein.
- **Coffee** is high in caffeine, which has been shown to improve mood, alertness and mental performance.
- **Oatmeal** is the best breakfast choice for cereal lovers. Its unique fibre, called beta-glucan, can help to reduce cholesterol.
- **Chia seeds** are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids and a high source of fibre.
- **Berries** are packed with antioxidants, lower in sugar than other fruits, yet higher in fibre.
- **Green tea** contains a healthy dose of polyphenols and antioxidants. It contains caffeine, which improves alertness and mood, and raises the metabolic rate.



The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.

— Dolly Parton, singer



The Toughest Fitness Challenge: **Boxing**

It's the sport that never fades away. Every few years a new boxing-type exercise emerges, such as kickboxing, or a round of workouts of fewer than 15 minutes that includes boxing moves.

The appeal is that the steady cardio and strength training of boxing—coupled with the benefits of warmups like skipping, plus upper-body conditioning—can improve cardiovascular endurance, hand-eye coordination and ramp up your total fitness level.

Fitness writer Laura Williams notes on [GirlsGoneSporty.com](#) that boxing workouts typically include the jabs, crosses and hooks—plus the footwork that goes with these punches. If you're interested in amateur boxing, you'll learn how to throw and take punches. But for most of us, the boxing training is a killer workout that conditions every part of the body.

Boxing is routinely ranked as the most difficult sport because—compared to other sports—it requires equal ability in strength, power and endurance and because it also requires much more muscle movement among all the muscle groups. A study by ESPN a few years ago determined that boxing is the sport that requires the most athleticism. The careful balance of constant motion while trying to punch and not be punched takes enormous co-ordination and effort for competitive boxers.

For those who'd like to set up their own space for a boxing workout, it only takes a few pieces of equipment.

Skip to it

A rite of passage for young children, skipping has always been a great cardio workout and is routinely used in boxing training. Here's why:

- Boxers warm up with skipping and they continue to perfect this skill because it builds stamina.
- Tones both upper and lower body muscle groups.
- Helps with co-ordination and agility while also improving balance.
- Builds bone density.



Don't be afraid to go out on a limb. It's where the fruit is.

— Shirley MacLaine, actress



Pump It Up

Researchers at Wake Forest University in North Carolina have found that combining weight training with a low-calorie diet for older adults helps to preserve lean muscle mass that previously may have been lost through aerobic workouts.

The 18-month study, published in the journal *Obesity*, tracked almost 250 participants who were all in their 60s and were overweight or obese. Participants had their calories restricted and performed resistance training with weight machines. The result was a decrease in fat, but with less loss of muscle.

Researchers noted that older adults typically use walking as their exercise, but that weight training may be the better option for those concerned about losing muscle. The research is particularly important as older adults usually regain fat mass as opposed to muscle. As well, loss of lean mass can play a crucial role as older adults often face physical disability as they age.

10-minute Climb Better Than Caffeine

If you've had a poor sleep, the solution is to turn to caffeine for a shot of energy. But a new study out of the University of Georgia has found that you could be better off taking a 10-minute walk up and down a set of stairs.

The research focused on sleep-deprived adults who, instead of having caffeine, walked stairs at a regular pace for 10 minutes and reported feeling more energized and motivated than those who'd consumed 50 milligrams of caffeine. The results were published in the *Journal of Physiology and Behavior* and reported by ScienceDaily.com.

The study's co-author Patrick J. O'Connor, of the department of kinesiology at the university, and his colleagues say this is good news for office workers, who can find it hard to pry themselves away from their desks.

Office staff members typically have access to staircases and can use the 10-minute break to refresh themselves and gain focus. O'Connor also pointed out that this exercise can be done no matter the weather and seems to work better than caffeine as a motivator for staff.



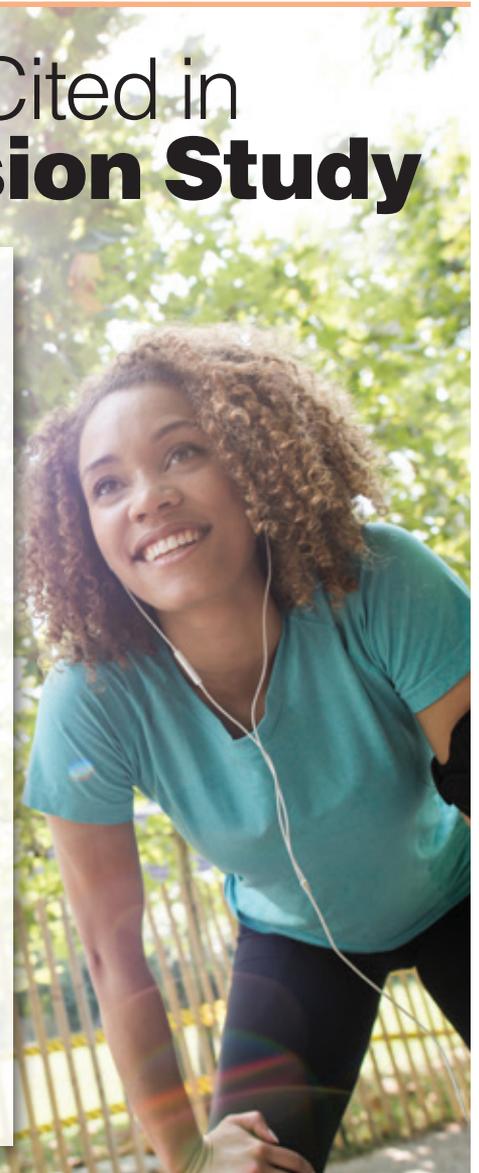
Exercise Cited in Depression Study

A new study has found that exercise can be just as important as antidepressants for depressed patients.

The findings showed that those who participated and had higher fitness levels in middle age were less likely to die from heart disease later in life—even if they had been diagnosed with depression.

The study, published in the *Journal of American Medical Association Psychiatry*, found that participants with the highest levels of fitness were about 56 percent less likely to die from heart disease following a diagnosis of depression.

Researchers say the results are important on several levels: for post-secondary students who enter the workforce and may not be as active as they were previously; and because exercise may decrease inflammation, which can play a role in depression.



If we did all the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves.

— Thomas Edison, inventor



Tune In to Sleep

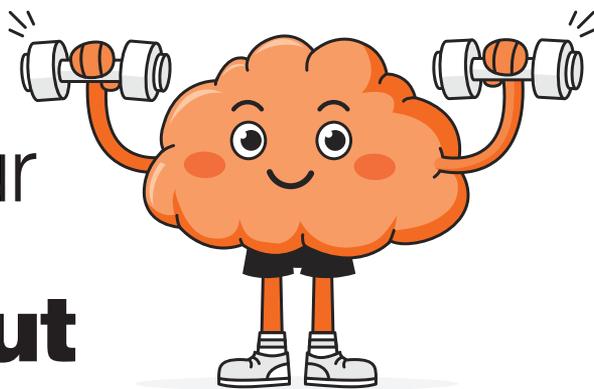
We're all tapped into social media and seemingly 24-7 screen time. But we should be relaxing and making time to wind down before sleep, says one expert.

Dr. Michael J. Breus, who calls himself the Sleep Doctor, suggests on his website thesleepdoctor.com that we rethink our nighttime rituals so we can sleep better and decrease stress.

As much as the right music can take us from mediocre to magnificent during a workout, the right music can assist in creating better sleep and sleep patterns, such as falling asleep more easily and staying asleep—all of which works toward decreasing stress and bolstering the immune system.

Breus recommends something that is soothing and with a rhythm of 60 to 80 beats per minute, but stay clear of music that triggers an emotional response. And, not surprisingly, he recommends music without lyrics.

Give Your Brain a Workout



Games that challenge the brain can stimulate the growth of dendrites, those bodies that send out signals from the brain's neuron cells. As more dendrites develop, the neural communication within the brain improves. And chess is a perfect example of a game that can provide this.

Chess is a powerful exercise for the mind: it uses both sides of the brain, which means players can respond more quickly. Several studies of students who played chess found their IQ scores increased after several months of playing, and a landmark 1992 study of New Brunswick students showed those who played chess scored significantly higher on standardized tests.

The benefits of chess also include increased creativity and problem-solving skills and improvements in memory. The game is also used to assist stroke patients in their recovery as it helps to develop motor skills.

Coffee, Please

Caffeine consumption has been long associated with a lower risk for Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. But until now, researchers weren't clear on why this was the case.

A new study shows that caffeine improved the functional capacity of endothelial cells, which line the interior of blood vessels, and that the effect involved mitochondria, the cells' energy powerhouses.

The work, published in the journal *PLOS Biology* this year, found that caffeine's action on the mitochondria was to promote protection and repair of the heart.

The results could lead to strategies for protecting heart muscle from damage, including the consumption of caffeine as an additional dietary factor in the elderly population.



My idea of heaven is a great big baked potato and someone to share it with.

— Oprah Winfrey, talk-show host

A new study shows the consumption of lentils can lower blood-glucose levels by more than 20 percent. And although Canada is a major producer of this crop, on average only 13 percent of us eat them regularly.

A study in the *Journal of Nutrition*, professor Alison Duncan, Department of Human Health and Nutritional Sciences, University of Guelph, and Dan Ramdath of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, reported that swapping half a portion of rice and potato side dishes for lentils can significantly improve the response to the carbohydrates, according to ScienceDaily.com. Lentils are pulses, the edible and nutrient-dense seed portion of plants in the legume family.

Replacing half a serving of rice with lentils caused blood glucose to drop about 20 percent, and the replacement of potatoes with lentils resulted in a 35 percent drop.

The study involved 24 healthy adults who were fed four dishes: white rice only, half white rice and half large green lentils, half white rice and half small green lentils, and half white rice and half split red lentils.

The glucose levels in the participants' blood were measured before eating and for two hours after and the blood-glucose level decreased by similar amounts when

Adding legumes to your diet

- Add a handful of legumes to almost any salad, including Greek salad.
- Make lentils the focus of a salad with some chopped vegetables and a vinaigrette and fresh herbs.
- Use legumes as a fibre source for soups and stews.
- Spread sandwiches with hummus (chickpea purée) instead of mayonnaise.
- Give omelettes a boost with the addition of beans.



half of the starch was replaced with each of the different types of lentils.

Blood glucose is found in the blood during digestion and its level depends on the starch content of foods that have been consumed. Pulses can slow the rate of digestion as well as the release of sugars that are found in starchy foods such as potatoes and rice—which reduces blood glucose.

The advantage of this is that the blood glucose level doesn't spike, which is an important factor in the management of Type

2 diabetes.

This slower absorption means you don't experience a spike in glucose. Having high levels over a period of time can lead to mismanagement of blood glucose, which is the hallmark of Type 2 diabetes. Essentially, eating lentils can lower that risk.

Pulses contain components that inhibit enzymes involved in absorption of glucose, and fibre contained in these foods can encourage the production of short-chain fatty acids, which can also help to reduce blood glucose levels, adds Duncan.

According to Health Canada, there needs to be a 20 percent reduction in blood glucose levels before such a claim can be approved.

The study researchers said they are working toward this health claim, which may encourage people to eat more pulses.



An Update on Blood Glucose Levels

Longer Work Hours Linked to Diabetes in Women

Working 45 hours per week or more is linked to a heightened risk of diabetes in women, according to an observational study reported in the journal *BMJ Diabetes Research & Care*.

The increased risk was not found in women who worked 30 to 40 hours per week. Previous research has indicated such results, but most studies involved men.

The new study tracked more than 7,000 healthy Canadian workers in Ontario between the ages of 35 and 74 for a 12-year period and included influential factors such as sex, marital status, ethnicity, parenthood, health, lifestyle and weight, among others. Long work hours could be linked to chronic stress, which may prompt an increase in



hormonal reactions and insulin imbalances.

The study may provide insight as global estimates suggest that 439 million adults will be living with diabetes within 12 years.

You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me.

— C.S. Lewis, author

Exercise Plays Key Role in Depression and Heart Disease

People with high fitness levels in middle age were shown to be less likely to die from heart disease in later life even if they had been diagnosed with depression, according to a new study.

The research—undertaken in a joint effort between the University of Texas Southwestern and The Cooper Institute—involved almost 18,000 participants. A lack of motivation and a feeling of hopelessness is well documented in patients who experience depression, say experts. But staying on track with exercise may play as important a role as being prescribed an effective antidepressant.

The difficulty is in maintaining motivation. The study's authors say that keeping up an exercise regimen is difficult for those who are depressed, but that it can be done. In fact, the authors cite previous research that shows depressed patients can perform about three-quarters of the exercise when asked to.

As a result, the study's authors recommend a few tips to stay on track for exercise:

- Set aside time each day to exercise. The authors also stress that if the regimen goes off track, it's important to get back to it as soon as possible—and to not get discouraged.
- Vary the exercises in order to avoid monotony and to keep the workout interesting and fun.
- Undertake your exercise regimen with a friend, who can offer encouragement and to help you be accountable.
- Log the exercise results to help track your progress.

The authors say that establishing the habit of exercise early helps, and can play a life-long role in combatting depression.

Depression has been linked to chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity and kidney disease.



Prolonged Sitting Linked to Brain Function

Turns out that aside from the negative effects that too much sitting has on our

bodies, a preliminary study out of UCLA concludes that it's also bad for our brains.

Researchers wanted to explore how sedentary behaviour affects the brain and specifically sought out the changes in the forma-

tion of memory. What they found—after collecting details from 35 people aged 45 to 75 about physical activity and hours spent sitting—was that MRI results revealed a thinning of the medial temporal lobe (MTL), which is the part of the brain involved in the formation of new memories.

More hours spent sitting are associated with thinner MTL regions, which can be

a precursor to dementia and a decline in cognitive ability. Researchers say the next step will be to follow a group of people for longer in order to determine if sitting causes the thinning. As well, the roles of gender, race and weight will be examined.

MTL thinning may be a precursor to cognitive decline and dementia in middle-aged and older adults. A reduction in sedentary behaviour could be the course of action to improve brain health, particularly for those at risk for Alzheimer's disease.

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For sales and subscriptions please contact Andrea Burgers at 604.473.0305 or aburgers@canadawide.com.

For administration inquiries please contact Tracy McRitchie at 604.473.0388 or tmcrichtie@canadawide.com.

Editor: L. Mitges

Art Director: Bernhard Holzmann

Publisher: Brad Liski

Contributing Writers: Patricia Chuey, L. Mitges

Advisory Board: Patricia Chuey, R.D., Chris Cunningham, M.D., Lori Yarrow, D.C., P.M.P.

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