

Solutions

Health and Wellness Information from
Family Services Employee Assistance Programs (FSEAP)

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Newsletter



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Mindfulness for the Holidays

The Holidays can be a joyful and festive time to connect with friends and family. It can also be a time for increased demands and expectations, which evoke feelings of exhaustion, anxiety, loss, and disappointment. Have you ever found yourself trying to remember what you did for the holiday break, or felt as if you needed another break to recuperate? It's possible you were operating on automatic pilot, not truly paying attention to what you were doing - looking without seeing, eating without tasting - and perhaps even holding your breath without even realizing. When going through the motions, we are more likely to interpret stressful events in unhelpful ways which can negatively affect our mood. The secret to navigating the ups and downs of any busy holiday season is to be mindful! This means staying in the present in each moment.

While the practice of Mindfulness has its origins in the Buddhist tradition and eastern meditation practices, it does not require a cultural or religious perspective or belief. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally" (p. 145). It involves slowing down your mind and finding a relaxed state of awareness in which you can observe your breath, body sensations, thoughts, emotions and the world around you without trying to control anything. The benefits of mindfulness practices have become widely recognized in mainstream and scientific communities.

They can help treat many psychological and physical difficulties such as stress, anxiety, depression, hypertension, insomnia, fatigue and chronic pain.

In fact, practicing mindfulness meditation on a regular basis can produce measurable increases in the density and connectedness of various regions of the brain, literally changing how we think, feel, and respond to life stressors.

Being mindful doesn't mean you have to agree with or like emotionally triggering situations. Instead, it allows you to increase self-awareness, see the situation for what it is, and accept the present moment without trying to push it away or over-engage. So make this holiday a mindful one! This can go a long way in helping you enjoy the season in authentic ways, returning your focus to the positive, and enjoying the people, experiences and meaning of the holidays.

Happy Holidays!

Mindfulness practices have the following benefits:

- Slows aging of the brain
- Strengthens immune functioning
- Reduces stress and tension
- Sharpens concentration, attention and focus
- Improves emotion regulation, creativity, and productivity
- Increases self-awareness, perception, cognitive functioning and decision-making
- Improves memory and learning
- Promotes objectivity and constructive responses to experiences
- Enhances feelings of empathy, compassion and connectedness towards self and others
- Deepens feelings of well-being, joy and inner peace

fseap Now we're
talking.

WHAT THE EFAP CAN DO. If you are experiencing emotional or mental health issues, particularly if they are lasting and do not seem to resolve, it is important you talk to someone who can help. Your EFAP is just a call away. We can connect you with supports and services that can make a difference in how you feel and manage the challenges of daily life at home and at work.



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Tips for Cultivating Mindfulness

- Set an Intention for This Holiday Season - Do you find yourself rushing around, overspending and over consuming? Reflect and prioritize what is most important to you; then, align your personal values and goals with appropriate activities and behaviours.
- Be Curious - Turn your attention inward; be curious about your everyday experiences. What are you thinking & feeling? How does your body feel? If you notice signs of anxiety or tension, intentionally slow down; seek healthy strategies that give you comfort, energy or strength.
- Engage Your Five Senses -Put down the camera - connect with others or the scenery with your own eyes; savour the tastes and textures of delicious food. Remember to breathe and feel the warmth of the sun or the crisp cool air on your face. Listen to the sounds of nature.
- Just Breathe-Focus on your breath. Inhale deeply, hold for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly and fully. You may find that you become lost in thought. When you notice your mind wandering, simply bring your focus back to your breath. Becoming aware of your breath will bring you back to the present moment, quiet the mind, regulate your physiological state and keep you grounded.
- Start or Renew a Meditation Practice- Focus on an anchor of awareness such as breath or sound for at least 5 to 10 minutes. Develop an observing mind that gently redirects your attention to the present moment
- Savour Holiday Treats - Listen to your body. Are you hungry or thirsty? Make every meal mindful by sitting down at a table, planting your feet firmly on the ground and savouring each bite. Choose your treats thoughtfully and enjoy them fully!
- Promote a Grateful Heart- Identify a few things each day that you feel thankful for, and find opportunities to express gratitude to others. An appreciative attitude can help shift your perspective to the positive. Remember, the happiest people are not the ones who have the best of everything; they are the ones who are grateful for everything they have.

With over 20 years clinical experience Jung brings a broad range expertise to her work as an EAP Counsellor. She holds certifications in many therapeutic modalities, is a Registered Clinical Counsellor, and a Registered Marriage and Family Therapist.

Resources:

1. **The Now Effect: How a Mindful Moment can Change the Rest of Your Life** by Elisha Goldstein (2012)
2. **A mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Workbook** by Bob Stahl (2010)
3. **Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life** by Jon Kabat-Zinn

How Your EFAP Can Help

- Confidential services
- Information to help with work and life
 - Immediate assistance 24/7/365

To access EFAP services, just call
1.800.667.0993 | TTY 1.888.234.0414

Stay-Tuned! FSEAP is offering a 30 day Weight loss challenge starting in January 2014. Work with a Registered Dietitian to lose those unwanted holiday pounds. Will you be ready for the Challenge? To sign up, call FSEAP at the beginning of January!

To access EFAP services call 1-800-667-0993.

Important notice: Information in Solutions is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health or legal professional. For further help, questions, or referral to community resources for specific problems or personal concerns, contact FSEAP at 1.800.667.0993 or another qualified professional.