

December 7, 2012

THUMBS Up HEALTH



Tips to Prevent Holiday Stress and Depression

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS

If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

REACH OUT

If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

BE REALISTIC

The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos.

SET ASIDE DIFFERENCES

Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.

STICK TO A BUDGET

Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Try these alternatives: Donate to a charity in someone's name, give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.



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PLAN AHEAD

Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for party prep and cleanup.

LEARN TO SAY NO

Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.

DON'T ABANDON HEALTHY HABITS

Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity.

TAKE A BREATHER

Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Listen to soothing music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF YOU NEED IT

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

DON'T LET THE HOLIDAYS BECOME SOMETHING YOU DREAD

Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.



RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Zesty Potato Skins

Description

Visually appealing and delicious, these filled potato skins are perfect for entertaining or snacking. Spiced with Southwestern flair, they're a great alternative to the usual chips and dip.

Ingredients

- 6 medium red potatoes, baked (about 1 1/4 pounds)
- Vegetable oil spray
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 8 ounces fat-free or low-fat cottage cheese, undrained
- 1/2 teaspoon grated lime zest
- 1 1/2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon dried chives
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- 24 black olive slices (4 large olives)

Cooking Instructions

Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Cut each potato in half. Scoop out the center, leaving about 1/4 inch of potato on the inside of each skin. Cut the skins into quarters. Lightly spray the insides of the skins with vegetable oil spray.

In a small bowl, combine the garlic powder, 1/2 teaspoon chili powder, cumin, and pepper. Sprinkle the mixture evenly on the insides of the potatoes. Place the skins with skin side down on a baking sheet.

Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until lightly browned.

Meanwhile, in a food processor or blender, process the remaining ingredients except the olives until smooth.

Spoon about 1 teaspoon of the cottage cheese mixture onto each potato skin and top with an olive slice.

NUTRITION ANALYSIS

(per serving)

| | |
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| Calories: 73 | Total Fat: .5 g |
| Saturated Fat: 0 g | Monounsaturated Fat: 0 g |
| Polyunsaturated Fat: 0 g | Sodium: 125 mg |
| Cholesterol: 1 mg | Fiber: 1 g |
| Carbohydrates: 14 g | Protein: 2 g |
| Sugar: 1 g | |

DIETARY EXCHANGES

1 Starch
1/2 Very Lean Meat