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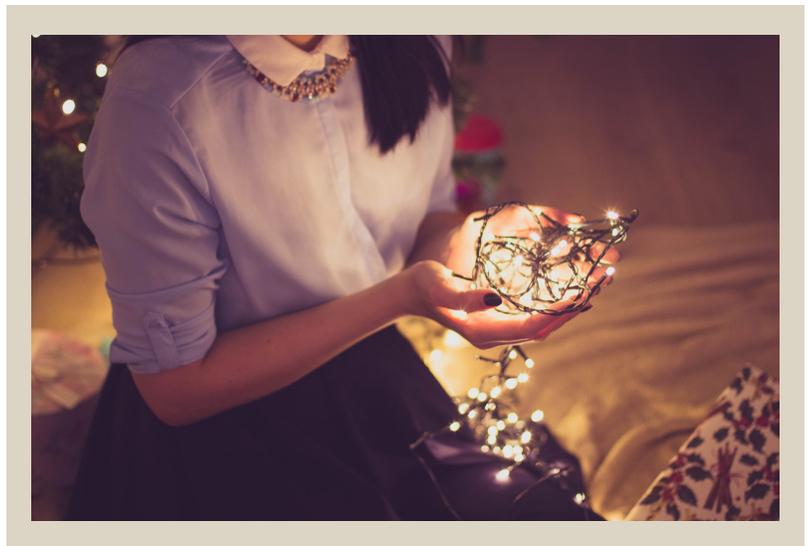
Wellness Wednesday

How to Feel a Little Less Alone During the Holidays

The holidays are about being with your loved ones and celebrating with friends and family.

But this time of the year can also be challenging for people who have experienced a recent loss, who aren't close with their family or who may be going through a divorce or breakup. Simply put, the jolly season can feel incredibly isolating for some.

The good news is that there are steps you can take to ward off seasonal sadness. Here are just a few expert-backed ways to feel less alone during what's supposed to be "the most wonderful time of the year."



1. DON'T RETREAT FROM ACTIVITIES

The temptation to avoid the holidays may be strong, but doing so may increase symptoms of loneliness and even depression, according to Jeff Nalin, a licensed clinical psychologist and executive director at Paradigm Treatment Center, an adolescent mental health facility in California. Instead of hunkering down inside your home, he suggested seeking out time with a good friend or engaging in an activity you enjoy.

Keith Humphreys, a psychiatrist at Stanford Health Care, advised asking someone in the same boat as you to team up to do something fun. "It could be something major like sharing a Christmas meal but it could easily be simpler, like a shared cup of coffee. There's no magic to it, someone just needs to take the initiative to reach out," he said.

2. PLAN EARLY

"See who else is flying solo for the holidays. Make a fun plan like apartment-hopping or have a get-together in your building," said Rori Sassoon, a relationship expert and CEO of the elite matchmaking service Platinum Poire. And if someone invites you to a festive gathering, take a chance and say yes. "In my experience, people don't extend invitations unless they want you to take them up," said Prudence Henschke, a divorce and breakup coach based in Melbourne, Australia. "Give the people around you an opportunity to be there for you."

3. HOST YOUR OWN PARTY

Are you dreading attending get-togethers that will inevitably be filled with couples? Barbie Adler, founder and president of Selective Search, a North American matchmaking service, suggested hosting your own soiree. If you're single and not wanting to be around public displays of affection, for instance, wrangle up some non-coupled pals to do something fun. "Whether it's a girls night or a holiday brunch, plan something for you and your other single friends, because you're not the only one," she said.

4. GET YOUR BODY MOVING

Studies suggest loneliness can cause a variety of health problems and even increase your chances of developing heart disease or having a stroke. Exercise has been shown to improve both your physical and mental health. Don Mordecai, a psychiatrist and national leader for mental health and wellness at Kaiser Permanente, suggested working up a sweat to fight off a bout of seasonal sadness. Bonus points if you can make your fitness routine social. "If you have extra time on your hands, combine physical and social health by joining a walking club or taking an exercise class like yoga," he said.

5. GIVE BACK TO OTHERS

Find somewhere to volunteer, like a homeless shelter or food bank, instead of focusing on what or who you are missing. "Volunteering your time will be so appreciated by the organization and the people they help," explained Rachel Tomlinson, a registered psychologist in Perth, Australia. "It will help you to feel connected, valuable and experience a rush of confidence or self-esteem."

Research shows giving back can increase happiness. Even a small gesture will do. "The best way to receive love is to give love, your time and your energy," said Bonnie Winston, a nationwide celebrity matchmaker and relationship expert. "It can be helping out a veteran, a child with cancer or even some random acts of kindness toward a stranger. It will immediately boost your feelings."

6. KEEP UP WITH TRADITIONS OR ADD IN SOMETHING NEW

The season can bring out the sentimental side of many people, and it may help to keep an old tradition going if you are missing someone special. "This is a wonderful way of honoring their memory," said Angel M. Hoodye, a professional counselor and owner of Flourishing Hope Counseling in Kingsville, Texas. She added that starting a new tradition may even help feelings of loneliness or grief.

7. KNOW THAT IT'S OK TO NOT FEEL OK

The holidays can be tough if you've just suffered a loss, or if you're unable to be around family. Be patient and gentle with yourself if you're feeling low or not in the mood to celebrate. "Give yourself space to process your emotions," said Emily Cosgrove, a Canadian-based licensed marriage and family therapist and life coach. "It's OK to not feel OK. It's OK to feel lonely, grieve or miss them."

Shadeen Francis, a licensed marriage and family therapist practicing in Philadelphia, also suggested taking some time to check in with yourself and ask yourself how you're feeling. "Self-reflective practices, like meditation or journaling, can also make the difference between feelings of overwhelm and peace," Francis said.

8. SUPPORT OTHERS WHO MAY BE FEELING THE SAME WAY YOU ARE

"Who among the people you know have struggled or suffered this year? Let them know you are thinking of them," said Helena Plater-Zyberk, the co-founder of Supportiv, a program that provides instant and anonymous peer support for everyday life struggles like loneliness.

She noted that the holidays are a time for reflection and can be challenging for certain people, especially when their go-to support systems are busy running errands and wrapping presents. "They may have received an outpouring of support when their struggle occurred, but now everyone's so preoccupied that their troubles are forgotten. Be a part of the support network that doesn't forget," she said, adding that this can give you a sense of purpose and help to fulfill any void you feel in your own life.

9. LIMIT TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Constant browsing can set you up for failure. Sites like Facebook and Instagram will inevitably be filled with posts about people gathering with family and significant others, said Benjamin Ritter, founder of Live for Yourself Consulting, a personal and professional coaching service. Research even shows that excessive social media use can lead to increased feelings of loneliness.

"Seeing others celebrating the holidays with loving relationships will force you to reflect on your own life with harsh criticism," Ritter said. "Take the holidays, especially if you're going to be by yourself, to detox from the outside world, and spend some time enjoying who you are."

10. PRACTICE GRATITUDE

"In times of sadness and loneliness, it's sometimes difficult to focus on gratitude, however we all have things to be grateful for," Nalin said. Research shows practicing gratitude has health benefits, including reducing stress and depression. Nalin suggested training yourself to recognize what you are thankful for and focusing on the positive by starting a gratitude journal. (This list might help you come up with a few ideas.)

"Practicing mindfulness gratitude meditations are also immensely helpful," Nalin said. Many guided meditations can be found online and on apps such as Calm and Headspace.

11. DO SOMETHING NICE FOR YOURSELF

A little self-care goes a long way. Take some time to pamper yourself during the holidays and treat yourself to a day of relaxation or an activity that you will thoroughly enjoy. "Take a relaxing bath, read a good book, snuggle up to a great movie or learn something new," said Lisa Lieberman Wang, an emotional breakthrough expert and author of *Fine to Fab*.

Article source: <http://bit.ly/2QKmbfZ>



This Week's Exercise

Janu Sirsasana



LET'S GET STARTED!

BENEFITS OF THE STRETCH

JANU SIRSASANA STIMULATES THE KIDNEYS AND THE LIVER. THE POSE REDUCES HEADACHE AND ANXIETY AND IS THERAPEUTIC FOR INSOMNIA. IT ALSO HELPS YOU LOSE BELLY FAT.

WHAT DOES JANU SIRSASANA STRETCH?

JANU SIRSASANA STRETCHES YOUR SPINE, HAMSTRINGS, AND ABDOMEN.

ABOUT THE POSE: JANU SIRSASANA OR THE HEAD TO KNEE POSE IS A SEATED ASANA THAT REQUIRES YOUR HEAD TO TOUCH YOUR KNEE. IT IS A BEGINNER LEVEL ASHTANGA YOGA ASANA.

PRACTICE THE ASANA IN THE MORNING ON AN EMPTY STOMACH OR EVENING AFTER A GAP OF 4 TO 6 HOURS FROM YOUR LAST MEAL. HOLD IT FOR 30 TO 60 SECONDS.

Source: <http://bit.ly/2Gcazye>

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.

BAKED BEEF AND CHEESE MANICOTTI



Ingredients

1 carton (15 ounces) part skim ricotta cheese
3/4 pound 93% lean ground beef
1/4 cup onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley, plus more for garnish
2 cups shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese, divided*
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1/4 teaspoon salt
black pepper, to taste
3 1/2 to 4 cups Pomodoro Fresco sauce (about 1 1/2 jars)
14 manicotti pasta shells (8 ounces) (for gluten-free use Jovial)*

Directions

1. Heat a heavy medium skillet over high heat. Add the ground beef, season with salt and pepper. Saute until the meat browns, drain then add the onion and garlic, cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, and cool.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the ricotta cheese, cooled ground beef, parsley, 1 cup mozzarella cheese, Parmesan cheese, egg, salt and black pepper. Transfer the a piping bag or gallon size ziplock bag, with a 1/2 inch hole snipped off the corner and stuff each uncooked manicotti shell with about generous 1/4 cup each.
3. Spread 1 cup of the sauce mixture into a greased 13x9-in. baking dish. Arrange stuffed manicotti shells in a single layer over sauce. Top with remaining sauce. Cover tight with foil and bake at 375F until pasta is tender, 60 to 65 minutes, until the pasta is tender and cooked. Uncover; sprinkle with remaining cheese and bake covered 3 minutes longer or until cheese is melted.

Nutrition Information

Yield: 7 servings
Serving Size: 2 manicotti

Amount Per Serving:
Freestyle Points: 10
Points +: 12
Calories: 438
Total Fat: 17.5g
Saturated Fat: 8g
Cholesterol: 94mg
Sodium: 760mg
Carbohydrates: 38g
Fiber: 4g
Sugar: 7g
Protein: 36g

Recipe source:

<http://bit.ly/2GbZKfM>