

life lines

information for your life

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WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOING HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS



When the decision is made to not return home for the holiday season, you can be faced with a number of emotions. Whether you're not able to head home for the holiday season because of financial constraints, work commitments, or because you'll be spending the time with your significant other's family, a mixture of reactions can be stirred up. It can be tough to feel as though you're missing out on the childhood and family traditions that often accompany the holidays. It's important to acknowledge any feelings you may be experiencing not only as you inform your loved ones of your plans, but also as you yourself start accepting the reality that you will be celebrating in a different way and perhaps in a different location. There is no right or wrong way to react to any situation; this includes not being able to head home for the holiday season. You may feel sad, angry, or irritable, or maybe it seems bittersweet. No matter what you are experiencing, take care to acknowledge your feelings and refrain from judging them.

Acknowledging your feelings is essential, but communicating these feelings is also critical. The holidays can be stressful, and tensions may be high, so it is important to be up front and communicate what you are feeling to those closest to you in order to avoid unnecessary conflict and misdirected emotions. Being able to acknowledge and communicate your own unique responses to changes in situations, especially with those closest to you, can help with the transition and assist in redefining holiday traditions. If this is the first time or your tenth time that you will not be heading home for the holidays, the below tips and suggestions may be helpful as you begin your own, brand new holiday customs:

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WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOING HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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No matter how you choose to spend the holidays, you have control over how you respond to your emotions. Don't be afraid to reach out for support and talk about how you are dealing with the stress of the season. Remember, everything changes, including where and with whom you celebrate. Don't be afraid of celebrating in a different way and embracing new possibilities.

- Plan an “alternate” holiday for you and your loved ones. Sometimes, it can be just as exciting knowing you will still be able to participate in the family fun, just maybe not on the specific holiday.
- Perhaps you can recreate in your home what you would be doing with your family. Reinvent some of those memories in your own home, perhaps with your significant other, your roommate, or even a pet!
- Even if you can't physically be with your loved ones, technology can come in handy. Try using Skype, FaceTime, or other social media. Sometimes just hearing familiar voices and sounds can make you feel as if you were there with family.
- Maybe it's too painful to reminisce with those you can't be with. If this is the case, try distracting yourself during high levels of holiday festivities that may fuel homesickness or heartache. Perhaps that means making plans with friends in the area, taking up a new hobby you have wanted to try, or even attending a show or concert.
- Try volunteering! Helping those less fortunate than yourself not only can provide a distraction, but can help you identify with something bigger than yourself.

Elliott, M. (Reviewed 2017). When you're not going home for the holidays. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.



Learning to **RELAX**

Most people can gauge how much stress they're under by the amount of physical and emotional tension they feel. Too much tension can be unhealthy as well as uncomfortable, which is why relaxation is so important. Relaxation provides a way for you to reduce some of the tensions developed as a result of stress-which in turn helps you to function more efficiently.

One of the ways the body copes with the effects of stress is by “powering down” every night when you sleep. During sleep, your body become very relaxed and your heart rate, pulse, respiration, blood pressure, and body temperature decrease. This gives your body and mind a chance to renew themselves and allows you to face the next day’s stress with a fresh supply of physical and mental vigor. While relaxation isn’t sleep, of course, it does produce many of the same benefits of a good night’s sleep:

- **Decreased muscle tension**
- **Lowered blood pressure**
- **Increased energy**
- **Improved immune-system functioning**
- **Reduced edginess or irritability**
- **Improved concentration**

In effect, relaxation does the opposite of what stress does, giving the body a break and helping to counteract many of the long- and short-term physical problems that stress can produce. Relaxation can also be a powerful tool in managing pain. It can help to reduce the muscle tension that often accompanies injury or illness, and can provide a distraction from pain and worry. Finally, even a brief relaxation exercise can provide a quick energy boost or give you a time-out from concentrating on a difficult problem or project. Often, when you return to a challenging problem after a short relaxation break, you’re able to focus better and generate new solutions.

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Learning to RELAX

RELAXATION TIPS

Continued

Practice

Learning to relax is like learning to play golf: It takes practice to relax, especially if you're used to being under a great deal of stress.

Understand relaxation is part of a healthy life.

Relaxation may sound like another term for goofing off, but it can be beneficial to your health. Research shows relaxation training can help alleviate the symptoms associated with many medical and psychological disorders, including

- High blood pressure
- Chronic and acute pain
- Nausea, vomiting
- Asthma and allergies
- Addiction
- Diabetes
- Insomnia
- Muscle spasms
- Headaches
- Anxiety and phobias
- Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Relax and enjoy life.

Once mastered, many of the benefits of relaxation can be enjoyed with only 15 to 20 minutes of practice per day. If meditation is a part of your relaxation skills, some believe you may enjoy increased longevity and quality of life.

Ways to Relax

There are many effective ways to practice relaxation, so you might want to try several to see what works best for you. Here are among the more common methods of relaxation.

Deep Breathing

One of the simplest relaxation exercises, deep breathing can be used in almost any situation, and no one will know but you. It involves taking slow, deep breaths, breathing from the diaphragm, and exhaling slowly to let the whole body relax a little more with each breath. Most of the relaxation methods below include deep breathing.

Progressive (Deep) Muscle Relaxation

This type of relaxation exercise involves alternately tensing, and then releasing, groups of muscles throughout the body. It's especially useful for those who say they feel tense everywhere, or for those who have trouble telling the difference between what's tense and what's relaxed.

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Learning to RELAX

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RELAXATION TIPS

Passive Muscle Relaxation

This is like progressive muscle relaxation, except that the muscles aren't tensed first. You move through each part of your body in turn, focusing on feelings of comfort and relaxation in all the muscles of that area. As you move from head to toe (or vice versa), you allow those feelings of relaxation to deepen and spread.

Meditation

This is a form of relaxation that has been practiced in many cultures for centuries. It involves resting in a comfortable position in a relatively distraction-free environment and focusing your attention on only one thing. This can be a mantra (a word or phrase that you repeat to yourself), a sound (wind, running water), or something visual (a candle flame, a spot on the wall, a pleasing photograph). The goal is to learn to refocus your attention each time you become distracted.

Imagery or Visualization

This involves relaxing while using your imagination to create a visual image of a relaxing, soothing or healing place or thing. Every element in this image—sight, sound, taste, action, and texture—is imagined to make it as real as possible.

Autogenics

This technique uses verbal commands to lead your body to a more relaxed state. Repeated words or phrases focus on the specific physical responses associated with relaxation. Phrases may refer to feelings of heaviness, warmth, regular heart rhythm, or muscle relaxation. Likewise, the phrases may focus on positive psychological concepts or images.

Self-Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a deep state of relaxation in which thoughts, suggestions, and images can be experienced as real. During self-hypnosis, the body is deeply relaxed and the mind is narrowly focused. It's possible to use hypnosis to alter physiological processes such as pain perception, blood flow, brain wave activity, and organ functioning, as well as thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

Biofeedback

This uses instruments to monitor and give feedback on physiological responses during relaxation. This is especially helpful in demonstrating the effects of thoughts and actions on physical processes such as heart rate, muscle tension, brain wave activity, blood pressure, respiration, or perspiration. Biofeedback does not make you relax—it simply helps provide information about what your body is doing. With this feedback, you can learn to modify your responses through a variety of relaxation strategies.

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Learning to RELAX

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Continued

How can I tell which relaxation method is best for me?

The choice of which relaxation technique to use depends mostly on your own personality and needs. Buy a book or a tape, or take a class. Experiment with a few to see which techniques work best for you.

When should I relax?

Any time you're thinking about relaxation, your body is probably sending you a signal that stress is starting to take a toll. You may want to take a relaxation break whenever you become aware of any of the following stress-related symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Decreased concentration
- Stiff or aching muscles
- Increased irritability or impatience
- Headache

What do I do if my boss catches me doing a relaxation exercise?

Most supervisors realize employees need occasional breaks, so you can explain that you use yours to do relaxation exercises rather than hang around the water cooler. You also can mention that the exercises improve your mental agility and attitude.

How can I relax when I have so much on my mind that it's hard to concentrate?

It's natural at first to have difficulty refocusing your thoughts toward relaxation—especially when you have a lot on your mind. For most people, relaxation is a skill that takes some practice. When you're learning, try practicing at a time when you're relatively calm and free of major distractions. When distractions do creep in, tell yourself to put them gently aside until your relaxation time is over—you will be better able to handle them afterwards.

I tried relaxation once or twice, and it made me feel anxious. What's up?

That can happen sometimes. Try using a very structured approach like progressive muscle relaxation. If it's still a problem, you may want to consult a relaxation therapist for advice or training.

Needham, S. (Revised 2019). Learning to relax. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.



Use **Fruits** and **Vegetables** to **Manage** Weight

Fruits and vegetables are part of a well-balanced and healthy eating plan. There are many different ways to lose or maintain a healthy weight. Using more fruits and vegetables along with whole grains and lean meats, nuts, and beans is a safe and healthy one. Helping control your weight is not the only benefit of eating more fruits and vegetables. Diets rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancer and other chronic diseases. Fruits and vegetables also provide essential vitamins and minerals, fiber, and other substances that are important for good health.

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Use **Fruits** and **Vegetables** to **Manage Weight**

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To lose weight, you must eat fewer calories than your body uses.

This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to eat less food. You can create lower-calorie versions of some of your favorite dishes by substituting low-calorie fruits and vegetables in place of higher-calorie ingredients. The water and fiber in fruits and vegetables will add volume to your dishes, so you can eat the same amount of food with fewer calories. Most fruits and vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories and are filling.

Here are some simple ways to cut calories and eat fruits and vegetables throughout your day.

Breakfast: Start the day right.

Substitute some spinach, onions, or mushrooms for one of the eggs or half of the cheese in your morning omelet. The vegetables will add volume and flavor to the dish with fewer calories than the egg or cheese. Cut back on the amount of cereal in your bowl to make room for some cut-up bananas, peaches, or strawberries. You can still eat a full bowl, but with fewer calories.

Lighten up your lunch.

Substitute vegetables such as lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, or onions for 2 ounces of the cheese and 2 ounces of the meat in your sandwich, wrap, or burrito. The new version will fill you up with fewer calories than the original.

Add a cup of chopped vegetables, such as broccoli, carrots, beans, or red peppers, in place of 2 ounces of the meat or 1 cup of noodles in your favorite broth-based soup. The vegetables will help fill you up, so you won't miss those extra calories.

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Use Fruits and Vegetables to Manage Weight

Continued

Dinner.

Add in 1 cup of chopped vegetables such as broccoli, tomatoes, squash, onions, or peppers, while removing 1 cup of the rice or pasta in your favorite dish. The dish with the vegetables will be just as satisfying but have fewer calories than the same amount of the original version.

Take a good look at your dinner plate. Vegetables, fruit, and whole grains should take up the largest portion of your plate. If they do not, replace some of the meat, cheese, white pasta, or rice with legumes, steamed broccoli, asparagus, greens, or another favorite vegetable. This will reduce the total calories in your meal without reducing the amount of food you eat. BUT remember to use a normal- or small-size plate—not a platter. The total number of calories that you eat counts, even if a good proportion of them come from fruits and vegetables.

Smart Snacks

Most healthy eating plans allow for one or two small snacks a day. Choosing most fruits and vegetables will allow you to eat a snack with only 100 calories.

About 100 Calories or Less

Snacks that amount to about 100 calories or less include.

- a medium-size apple (72 calories);
- a medium-size banana (105 calories);
- one cup steamed green beans (44 calories);
- one cup blueberries (83 calories);
- one cup grapes (100 calories); or
- one cup carrots (45 calories), broccoli (30 calories), or bell peppers (30 calories) with 2 tablespoons (tbsp) hummus (46 calories).

Instead of a high-calorie snack from a vending machine, bring some cut-up vegetables or fruit from home. One snack-sized bag of corn chips (1 ounce) has the same number of calories as a small apple, 1 cup of whole strawberries, and 1 cup of carrots with 1/4 cup of low-calorie dip. Substitute one or two of these options for the chips, and you will have a satisfying snack with fewer calories.

Remember: Substitution is the key.

It's true that fruits and vegetables are lower in calories than many other foods, but they do contain some calories. If you start eating fruits and vegetables in addition to what you usually eat, you are adding calories and may gain weight. The key is substitution. Eat fruits and vegetables instead of some other higher-calorie food.

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Use Fruits and Vegetables to Manage Weight

Continued

More Tips for Making Fruits and Vegetables Part of Your Weight-Management Plan

Eat fruits and vegetables the way nature provided—or with fat-free or low-fat cooking techniques

- Try steaming your vegetables, using low-calorie or low-fat dressings, and using herbs and spices to add flavor.
- Some cooking techniques, such as breading and frying, or using high-fat dressings or sauces, will greatly increase the calories and fat in the dish.
- Eat your fruit raw to enjoy its natural sweetness.

Canned or frozen fruits and vegetables are also good options. Frozen or canned fruits and vegetables can be just as nutritious as the fresh varieties. However, be careful to choose those without added sugar, syrup, cream sauces, or other ingredients that will add calories.

Choose whole fruit over fruit drinks and juices. Fruit juices have lost fiber from the fruit. It is better to eat the whole fruit, because it contains the added fiber that helps you feel full. One 6-ounce serving of orange juice has 85 calories, compared to just 65 calories in a medium orange.

Whole fruit gives you a bigger size snack than the same fruit dried—for the same number of calories. A small box of raisins (1/4 cup) is about 100 calories. For the same number of calories, you can eat 1 cup of grapes.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity. (Reviewed 2015, November 9). How to use fruits and vegetables to help manage your weight. Retrieved September 18, 2019, from <https://www.cdc.gov>



Twelve signs of psychological health include

- 1 Persistent presence of a support network
- 2 Consistent optimistic outlook and positive expectations
- 3 Frequent peak experiences
- 4 Spiritual involvement
- 5 Sense of humor
- 6 Ability to adapt to changing conditions
- 7 Rapid response and recovery of adrenaline system due to repeated challenges
- 8 Liking physical activity
- 9 Communicating well with others
- 10 Frequent gratitude, generosity, and related emotions
- 11 Increased sensitivity
- 12 Ability to adapt to changing conditions

U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center. (n.d.). 12 signs of psychological health. Retrieved October 23, 2018, from <https://www.med.navy.mil/>