

Comfort and Joy

Sail through the holidays with your
body, mind and spirit intact

BY LISA A. BEACH

FROM ATTENDING HOLIDAY parties, shopping for gifts and decorating your home to cooking for and entertaining the family, the hustle and bustle of the holidays have the potential to wreak havoc on your physical and mental health. Several experts weigh in with some healthy holiday hacks to navigate this joyful-but-stressful season.

SLEEP WELL, EAT WELL

You might be surprised at this healthy eating advice from registered dietician nutritionist Debbie Petitpain. As a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Petitpain's top self-care advice is to prioritize sleep. Why? "Sleep deprivation is often linked to an increase in appetite, particularly for



“Holiday activities and get-togethers are not performances that determine your self-worth.”

— PAULINE WALLIN,

LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

high-calorie and carbohydrate-rich foods,” she explains. “This can lead to overeating and weight gain over time.”

Petitpain also suggests embracing the 80/20 rule regarding food: Aim to make 80 percent of what you eat nourishing and balanced, and allow yourself 20 percent for indulging in festive treats. Before attending a holiday event, she suggests eating a balanced meal or snack with lean proteins, whole grains and plenty of vegetables. This helps you arrive feeling satisfied and less likely to overindulge.

WORKOUT AND ENLIST OTHERS TO JOIN

Exercise doesn't always have to mean a rigorous workout, says Sabrena Jo, senior director of science and research at the American Council on Exercise. She suggests incorporating movement into every day, whether that means a 20-minute after-dinner walk or morning stretches. The key is consistency and being mindful of your body's needs. “Pushing yourself too hard can lead to injuries, while doing too little can make you feel sluggish,” Jo advises. “Find a balance that



works for you.”

Also, Jo suggests making exercise a group event with family or friends. If you're in a snowy area, build

a snowman, have a snowball fight or go sledding. Play your favorite holiday tunes and have a spontaneous dance party. Or participate as a group in a festive-themed walk or fun run during the holidays.

THINK ABOUT SLEEP WAY BEFORE BEDTIME

When it comes to getting quality shut-eye during the holidays, consider how your choices throughout the day influence your sleep, says Jennifer Martin, professor of medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles. “Think about how the changes in your schedule and the activities that you're doing are affecting how much and how well you sleep at night,” she says.

Another way to protect sleep around the holidays? Limit alcohol consumption, especially in the last few hours before you go to sleep.



“A lot of people are tempted to drink more alcohol at holiday social events, and it's a huge thief when it comes to a good night's sleep,” Martin warns.

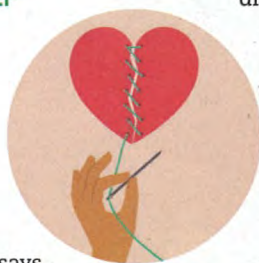
PROTECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

“Aim for ‘good enough’ rather than perfection regarding gifts, meals, decorations and get-togethers,” advises Pauline Wallin, a licensed psychologist in Camp Hill, Pa. “The extra effort to reach perfection is stressful and emotionally draining, and

rarely makes a difference for others,” Wal-
lin says, noting it's better to save that energy for connecting

with people and enjoying the moment. She suggests focusing on experiences, rather than accomplishments. “Holiday activities and get-togethers are not performances that determine your self-worth,” she notes.

Also, Wallin recommends infusing mindfulness into seasonal routines. “While working on holiday prep activities, slow down to enjoy sensory experiences,” she says. Notice the aromas while baking, listen to the crackle of paper while wrapping gifts and envision



guests enjoying the holiday meal you've prepared.

PRE-EMPT TRIGGERING RELATIONSHIP INTERACTIONS

“No drama” should be the mantra at this year's holiday get-togethers. “Identify unhealthy relationship dynamics — and what your relationship to those dynamics are going to be — in advance,” advises Taisha Caldwell-Harvey, a licensed psychologist and founder of The Black Girl Doctor. She says that it's usually not new triggers that pop up during the holidays — it's more likely the same patterns showing up differently. That could mean body insecurities or feelings of inadequacy that flare up every time you're around certain relatives or friends based on previous interactions. Once you identify your triggers, then you can decide how to respond differently.

Maybe you choose to be an observer instead of an engaged participant in this dynamic. Maybe you decide to skip the get-together entirely. Or maybe you choose to be a disrupter by doing something different. “This gives you more power and control over how you engage with something that you don't have a lot of control over,” explains Caldwell-Harvey, noting you'll want to prepare yourself for feeling uncomfortable when you interact differently. ■