

# In Touch with Extension

## Establish Healthy Traditions to Make Winter Fun, Prevent Cold-Weather Blues

Submitted by Jean Day

Frigid weather may seem like a good excuse to avoid workouts, stay inside and overindulge in comfort foods. However, health experts from the University of Missouri Extension have found that these tendencies leave most people feeling less content during the winter months. MU researchers say people should establish new traditions to increase happiness and avoid wintertime woes.

Instead of resolving to make drastic new year changes, establish healthy traditions for the winter months, MU nutrition and exercise physiology experts recommend. Incorporate activities and habits that promote health and can be shared with spouses, friends and family members each year. The experts suggest trying a variety of ideas.

“When thinking about New Year’s changes, a good first step is creating a vision for the future by picturing yourself happy and healthy,” said Karen Sherbondy, MU Extension special projects coordinator for Family Nutrition Education Programs. “Identify positive and negative aspects of your health and the health of others, including friends, family members, spouses and children. This provides a starting point for establishing new behaviors, avoiding negative habits and seeking help from others.”

“Regarding exercise and physical activity in the winter, some is better than none, more is better than some and too much is difficult to get,” said Steve Ball, state fitness specialist and associate professor in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. “Establish traditions to accommodate cold weather.



Try new things, such as dance classes, swimming or water aerobics, or check out exercise videos from the library. Invest in home fitness equipment, such as jump ropes, DVDs, treadmills and stationary bikes. Having equipment at home makes it easier to stay physically active. Search for bargains on gently used equipment and try different things to find what works best.”

“Think of things that are enjoyable — spending time with kids, making crafts, watching movies — and incorporate physical activity to enhance them,” Ball said. “Plan activity breaks, set a timer and have 5-10 minute

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## Forest Management and Mushrooms

Written by Sarah Havens

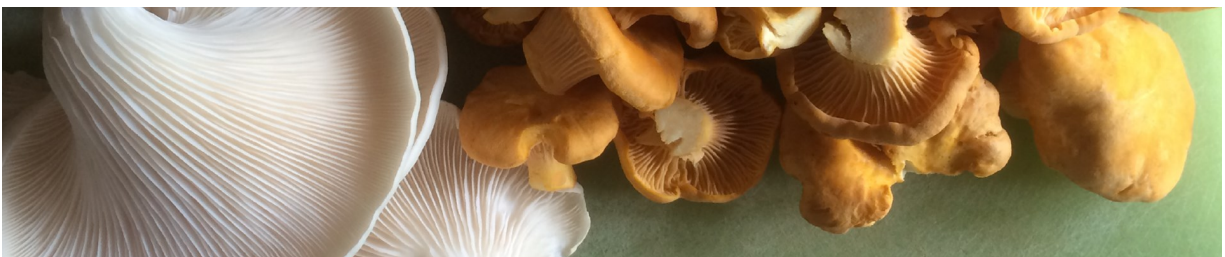
Forest management practices, such as timber harvests or forest stand improvements, can leave landowners with unused logs and wood materials. Timber harvests are used to thin forests by removing some or all of the saleable trees and the logs are taken and sold to the mill. The tops are left behind and can be a large amount of smaller diameter logs. A forest stand improvement, which is also sometimes referred to as a timber stand improvement, is a practice that thins forests that have smaller diameter trees. This practice allows us to leave behind our best trees for timber and wildlife and provide more resources to them by removing “undesirable growing stock”. Undesirable growing stock is the term for trees that do not have value as timber or for wildlife.

In many cases, the debris from either practice can be left to break down on its own and provide food for native fungi and insects or used for products like firewood or mulch. However, there is one great use for some of those unused, smaller diameter logs that makes for a tasty result! This is mushroom propagation. Several species of mushrooms can be propagated in the unused logs. Two common species of mushrooms, that utilize wood as a food source, are shiitake and oyster mushrooms.

It is important that you propagate in a certain time frame from when the logs were cut. Many trees have natural antifungal chemicals so it is recommended that logs sit for 2 weeks before propagation. Additionally, native fungi are generally stronger than our propagated fungi so cut logs should be inoculated within 6 weeks of being cut to introduce the spores of the cultivated mushrooms before native fungi claim it. Logs can be cut in 4 foot lengths and have diameters from 3-8 inches. There is a general rule that a log will produce mushrooms for one year for every inch of diameter.

Shiitake mushrooms are a commonly cultivated mushroom and are a great addition to many dishes! They prefer oak logs for cultivation. This is great in Missouri as our forests tend to be dominated by oaks. Propagation of shiitake mushrooms can be done using sawdust spawn or plug spawn. Both are incubated with the shiitake mushroom strain and then sold through mushroom supply companies. After cultivation of the logs, they are placed in a shady spot where they will receive plenty of moisture. It will generally be 6-9 months before mushrooms can be harvested but you will have them for several years!

MU-Extension offers a class called “Woodland Steward: Management and Mushrooms”. This class offers participants a chance to learn about the forest practices and their benefit for wildlife and timber production and then provides an opportunity for participants to learn how to inoculate a mushroom log.



## Rethink Family Gatherings to Ease Stress and Build Memories

Submitted and Adapted by Rachel Buenemann

Written by Danielle Day, Iowa State University Extension, <<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/rethink-holidays-ease-stress-and-build-memories>>

Gathering people together often brings stress, whether we're juggling multiple commitments or coping with loneliness. In 2020 the holiday season brought the added stress of navigating COVID-19, but can we plan less stressful gatherings in 2021? YES!

According to Mental Health America's 2021 State of Mental Health in America report, screenings for anxiety and depression skyrocketed and over 8 in 10 people who completed an anxiety or depression screening reported moderate to severe symptoms. Over 178,000 people reported frequently thinking about suicide, with 37% reporting they had thought about suicide more than half of the month or nearly every day in September 2020. From April to September, of those who reported moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety or depression, 70% reported that one of the top three things contributing to their mental health concerns was loneliness or isolation.



Here are some tips to reduce stress in 2021, especially around family gatherings.

**Rethink expectations**—Many people have routines and traditions around gatherings. These can include various celebrations, baking special items, meaningful decorations, concerts, community events and large gatherings. Consider individual expectations for your next event. What are ways to include family and friends who may be experiencing loneliness or isolation during this time? Can you incorporate some traditions on a more intimate scale? Be flexible.

**Practice self-care**—What stress-relieving activities can you practice during this time to lower your stress and anxiety levels? Perhaps dive into a good book. Watch family movies over ZOOM with the family. Get crafty. Maintain gathering traditions in smaller groups with the family in your household. Take a break from technology. Get adequate rest. It's OK to take a break.

**Stay connected**—Be creative to stay connected with each other. Perhaps use videoconferencing to share a large family meal, play games or bake. Create care packages for others of their favorite items. Send cards and make phone calls to those far away. Staying connected even when apart will help everyone with feelings of loneliness during this time.

**Create new traditions and memories**—Maybe make a new dish to celebrate an anniversary or schedule a game night. Show gratitude and appreciation for one another and for each person's uniqueness. Remember that new traditions aren't about money spent, but rather the memories that come from the time spent together.

If you or someone you know is struggling with feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts throughout this time, there are resources to help 24/7/365.

- Missouri Access Crisis Hotline, 1/800-833-3915
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 800-273-8255 or text HOME to 741741

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## Establish healthy traditions...

relays inside or outside, take a walk around the block during commercials or try games that get everyone moving.”

“There are several easy ways to improve mood during the winter,” said Alejandra Gudiño, health educator for HES and MU Extension. “Try practicing a few each day, even if they seem silly or unnecessary. They make a difference! Some ideas include: wearing bright colors, reading or watching something funny and laughing out loud — laughing reduces stress hormones and increases endorphins. Socialize and spend time with family, old and new friends, and those in need. Creating social ties can boost happiness, improve self-worth and increase sense of purpose.”

“Create fun traditions related to healthy eating,” said Ellen Schuster, former MU Extension state specialist. “For example, find healthy recipes online, print a dozen or more and randomly pick one to try each week. Many websites offer reviews and helpful comments.”

“Set realistic goals with measurable results,” Sherbondy said. “Small changes are easier than big changes and can add up over time. Focus on changing one or two behaviors. Once those are mastered, set new goals.”



### What to know what is happening with MU Extension?

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