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Briefings on Family Matters

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Taking Care of You During the Holidays

Mary Engram, Human Development Specialist

With the holidays approaching its time to think about keeping the stress down so the season won't turn from happy to horrible. Holiday stress is real, but there are many things that can be done to keep it in balance.

Most stress at holiday time comes from overloading schedules, overspending, setting expectations too high, or family friction. But with some thoughtful planning these stressors can be lessened or avoided.

First, don't try to do everything. Just thinking about not having enough time to do something increases stress levels. Choose a few meaningful holiday traditions that are important to you and your family and let less important activities go. This will allow you to be present in the moment and really enjoy the season.



Unreasonable holiday expectations may lead to disappointment. Consider opting for simple quality time at home with family. Playing games, watching movies, or enjoying outdoor activities can create important family bonds and memories.

When it comes to holiday spending, create a sensible budget and stick to it. This will still allow for the tradition of gift-giving without the burden of dealing with bills that come after the holidays are over.

Family relationships that are strained can become more so during the holidays. Remember that kind words and simple acts of thoughtfulness can go a long way toward mending fences or at least calling a truce during family get-togethers.

Finally, if the hustle and bustle catch up with you, remember that the easiest way to a quick de-stress is simply doing some deep breathing. Inhale and exhale with full awareness for three breaths. Focusing on your breathing can help you relax your muscles, slow your mind and heart rate, and calm your emotions.

Make it a *Happy* New Year

In her best selling book, [The How of Happiness](#), author Sonja Lyubomirsky shares research that points to a scientific path to finding happiness. Consider starting the new year with the goal of increasing personal happiness. Choose from the list below the activities that have the best "fit" for you.

1. Expressing Gratitude
2. Cultivating Optimism
3. Avoiding Overthinking
4. Practicing Acts of Kindness
5. Nurturing Social Relationships
6. Developing Coping Strategies
7. Learning to Forgive
8. Increasing Flow Experiences
9. Savoring Life's Joys
10. Committing to Your Goals
11. Practicing Religion and Spirituality
12. Taking Care of Your Body

Source: Lyubomirsky, S. 2008. *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Homemade Condensed Cream of Mushroom Soup

Are you looking for a healthier alternative to the canned cream of mushroom soup used in your beloved green bean casserole recipe? Give this one a try!

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/3 cups vegetable stock
2/3 cup milk
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh mushrooms
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. garlic powder
1/4 tsp. pepper
1/4 tsp. onion powder
1/8 tsp. celery seed (optional)
1/8 tsp. dried thyme

DIRECTIONS:

Bring vegetable stock to a boil in a large saucepan. In another bowl, whisk milk and flour. Slowly pour milk mixture into vegetable stock, whisking to combine. Whisk in mushrooms and remaining ingredients. Reduce heat to medium, and bring the mixture back to a very low boil, stirring constantly. Let mixture boil for about 3 minutes or until thickened.

Healthier Holiday Side Dishes

Bethany Bachmann, Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

The Holidays are here and so is the stress that comes with it! One of the most stressful parts of the season can be deciding what foods to prepare for all of the family gatherings.

I am always looking for dishes that are more nutritious, with less sugar and fat than the traditional holiday choices. So let's dive into one that I will be trying this year!

First, we have the traditional side dish of sweet potatoes. Whether it is Thanksgiving or Christmas, there is always some form of this vegetable on our table. Usually sweet potato dishes are laden with butter, brown sugar, and marshmallows, but it is extremely easy these days to find recipes that take sweet potatoes in an entirely different direction.

Honey Cinnamon Roasted Sweet Potatoes:

Servings: 4 **Prep time:** 5 minutes

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1 inch cubes
2 tablespoons honey
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, combine the honey, olive oil, cinnamon, salt and pepper. Add the sweet potatoes and toss to coat.
3. Dump potatoes onto a large rimmed baking sheet. Roast for about 25-30 minutes, stirring halfway through the cooking.

Source: www.bunsinmyoven.com

Asian Lady Beetles

Donna Aufdenberg, Horticulture Specialist

Over the years, the lady beetle or “ladybug” has been considered a beneficial insect because it devours plant pests such as aphids during the growing season. During this time of year however, they can become the pest.

Lady beetles feed on pest populations and do a fairly good job keeping pests in check. As a natural predator, they can do a better job than many pesticides because the lady beetle will continue to consume the same number of pests each day, keeping the population from fluctuating. In contrast, a pesticide will kill off current populations of pests, making a gardener believe that they are gone but in reality, populations will spike again when remaining eggs hatch. This lady beetle ranges in color from yellow/tan to red or orange and may or may not have spots.

Native to most areas of Asia, this beetle overwinters in cliffs in it’s native land but in the U.S. the insect overwinters in homes, outbuildings and on vertical structures. For this reason the it is considered a huge pest to homeowners. Large numbers of beetles make their way into houses through windows, doors and cracks with the largest number moving indoors in October for protection from the cold. Lady beetles do not reproduce indoors and do not spread disease or damage the home but they do have an odor.



The multicolored Asian Lady Beetle can have as many as 19 spots or it can have not spots.

If the Asian Lady beetle becomes a pest in your home, simple steps can be taken to reduce the number present. Seal any cracks or crevices in walls, floors and ceilings. Once the entry point is sealed, a vacuum cleaner can be used to suck up any beetles that have made it indoors. Once collected these can be burned or released into a field away from the home. Do not allow the beetles to stay in the vacuum very long as they can impart a permanent odor that will be noticeable each time the vacuum is started. As a secondary measure, pesticides can be applied in a band around windows, doors and foundations to provide a chemical barrier to the pests. This may require application by a professional pesticide applicator.

Lady Beetles as a Gardener’s Friend

Here are some facts about our lady beetle friend:

- ◇ Lady beetles are also called “ladybugs” or “ladybird beetles”.
- ◇ There are nearly 500 species in North America. Several of those are mostly black.
- ◇ Both adults and young are predators, mostly of aphids. They will also eat mites, scale, insect eggs, fly larvae and more.
- ◇ Like many insects, a ladybeetle hatches from an egg, goes through immature stages and then becomes an adult.
- ◇ Asian Lady Beetle, Seven Spot Lady Beetle, Convergent Lady Beetle, Pink Lady Beetle, and Four-spotted Lady Beetle are all common in Missouri.
- ◇ The “lady” in the name came when English farmers thanked “Our Lady” (the Virgin Mary) for the insect control they supplied in grape vineyards and agricultural fields.