

## Keeping the peace this holiday season

Yes, there is indeed no place like home for the holidays. For some, this sentiment brings thoughts of happiness, love, and joy. For others, maybe not so much.

Being home for the holidays is an ingrained tradition, as well as all the stress that comes with it. There are songs about it, movies about it and books about it. Perhaps you now live on the other side of the country, or perhaps even another country. Travelling in winter is never pleasant, especially if you only have a few days off and it takes almost all of those few days to get there.

And perhaps your family was one that was never close and visiting them is not really an option, especially if they caused you physical or psychological harm. You do not need to be confronted with that and you should not feel any guilt in choosing to stay away. In this case, it's time to create new traditions.

But if your family is exasperating and lovable all at once and you feel the need to reconnect with those you once shared shelter, toys and TV time with, there are ways to make this time a happier one. **Here are a few ideas:**

**Prioritize exercise.** Get out of the house regularly and go for a walk in the neighbourhood or check out old haunts you used to visit growing up. If the kids are with you, take them to places you used to play.



### **Keep close tabs on your emotions.**

A crucial part of emotional regulation is being able to recognize emotions as they arise. Check in on your emotional state to put out any fires before they become out of control.

**Know your triggers.** If, for example, alcohol loosens your tongue just a little too much, keep a lid on the rum and eggnog intake. Think back on past scenarios. Are there any patterns you've noticed that can be avoided in the future?

**Don't lose perspective.** Remember, all you will have one day are the memories of the older members of your family. Yes, maybe they are exasperating now, but at least you can still touch them and hug them. It's possible there's a future version of yourself sitting around wishing you'd spent the effort to see family while you still had the chance.

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# STRESS

## Don't relieve stress, eliminate it

Dealing with stress is practically a modern hobby. We invest fortunes in the latest fads for stress relief: spas, relaxation techniques, books, phone apps, gadgets and gizmos designed to ease our minds. But are we really taking the most effective approach?

If stress-relief techniques are not cutting it, go to the source. Take some serious time to evaluate the causes of stress in your life so you can reduce and eliminate them. Here are some common stressors and ideas for how to address them.

### Money.

Consumer culture tells us to spend, spend, spend, and it's easy to get caught up in the hype. But not feeling in control of your financial situation can be a major stress point. Make sure your purchases are things that really bring you joy and are not just for keeping up with the neighbours. Having a monthly budget will keep you on track and bring back your sense of control. If you're feeling overwhelmed, seek help from a financial planner. Having a good handle on your finances can lift a huge weight from your shoulders.

### Your home.

Shelter is a basic human need; we all need a safe haven where we can rest and relax.

If your living situation brings you more stress than comfort, imagine (realistically) what kind of home would bring you peace. That mansion in the hills is a fun fantasy, but keep your goals achievable. If too much maintenance is wearing you out, look at ways you can change that such as low maintenance landscaping. If clutter is making you claustrophobic, purge. Enlist the help of friends or an organizing expert if you have trouble things letting go.

### Your environment.

The people we interact with, our homes, workspaces and larger environment all have a huge effect on our well-being. Think about your previous week and where you were during times of stress. Perhaps talking with a negative acquaintance, sitting in traffic or working in a noisy office were triggers. Once you identify your stress points, you can do something about them. Changes can be big, but don't have to be. Simply cutting out a toxic relationship, finding a more scenic route to work or investing in some noise-cancelling headphones may be a great first step in reducing your environmental stressors. Tackle one issue at a time and work your way from small on up.

## A little butter with your coffee?

Bulletproof coffee is all the rage these days. It has many night show hosts buzzing and is even making the news worldwide. So, what is it and is it healthy for you?

Bulletproof or butter coffee combines coffee with unsalted butter and a medium chain triglyceride (MCT) like coconut oil. The ingredients are blended and served warm, taking on the look of a creamy latte.

Bulletproof coffee is a high calorie drink intended to replace a carb-heavy breakfast. According to the creator of this drink, starting the day with bulletproof coffee can help those who follow an intermittent fasting diet feel satiated, alert, and focused.

While it's filling and gives you more energy, there's no evidence it is a healthy meal replacement. You know what else can keep you feeling full? A healthy breakfast.

According to health.clevelandclinic.org, butter, oil, and coffee, even when combined, do not meet the standards of a well-balanced breakfast. It's important to have more nutrients, like protein and fibre, to help keep you fuller longer and to avoid any energy crashes.

### Skip this drink if you have:

**Diabetes:** When you stay full longer, you may be inclined not to eat at regular intervals, which isn't necessarily a good thing when you have diabetes.

**Gastrointestinal issues:** MCTs may be beneficial for people with GI issues who are experiencing weight loss, since they're a shorter chain length and are digested and absorbed much more efficiently. But some people who try butter coffee report experiencing unpleasant side effects like bloating, diarrhea and an upset stomach after drinking it.

**Heart problems:** People with high cholesterol and other heart issues are often advised to scale back on butter, due to its high amounts of saturated fat. Bulletproof coffee is definitely not part of a low-cholesterol diet.

Bulletproof coffee may be okay for some people, if you consume it as part of a balanced diet and don't have elevated cholesterol levels. If you're interested in trying Bulletproof coffee, it may be best to consult a healthcare professional to get your blood markers checked.



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# Ways to balance your gut microbiome

Friendly bacteria, or probiotics, are beneficial to human health. They help with digestion, nutrient absorption, and the production of essential vitamins and other compounds. On the other hand, “bad” gut bacteria can cause inflammation and fatigue, bog down the immune system, damage the intestinal lining, and cause illness.

While it's impossible to remove all bad gut bacteria or microbes, maintaining a healthy balance between good and bad microbes keeps harmful levels at bay. When there's an overgrowth of bad bacteria, symptoms like gas, bloating, abdominal pain, or conditions like inflammatory bowel disease or irritable bowel syndrome are common.

**Prolonged antibiotic use, heavy alcohol consumption, and other factors can offset your gut microbiome balance. Here are a few ways to restore a healthy balance of good and bad gut microbes:**

## **Eat a diverse diet**

Consuming a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds can help feed the good bacteria in your gut and promote their growth. A diet rich in fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and vegetables provides a variety of nutrients that support the growth of beneficial bacteria. Natural, whole foods are also high in fibre, which feeds the good bacteria in your gut.

## **Incorporate fermented foods**

Fermented foods have been a part of human diets for millennia and are still eaten in many cultures around the world. Fermented foods include tempeh, yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, and kombucha.

The beneficial bacteria found in fermented foods can help replenish and diversify the gut microbiome.

## **Reduce sugar**

Diets high in processed foods and added sugars can lead to an overgrowth of harmful bacteria in the gut. These foods can also lead to inflammation and contribute to a range of health problems. Take steps to reduce refined sugar in your diet. Look for ingredients such as corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, dextrose, and maltose on the label, and choose products with little or no added sugar. Choose water, unsweetened tea, or low-sugar options instead of soda, energy drinks, and fruit juice.

## **Manage stress**

When under physical or psychological stress, the body releases cortisol, which is a stress hormone that affects systems throughout the entire body -- including the gut. Research has found that chronic stress can negatively impact the gut microbiome by promoting the growth of harmful bacteria. In fact, chronic stress has been linked to the development of gastrointestinal disorders like inflammatory bowel disease. Of course, stress is a normal part of life. However, stress management techniques can give your body resilience and prevent stress from compromising your health. Use relaxation techniques like progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, or deep breathing. Try various stress management activities, like journal writing or meditation, to see what works best for you.

## Is it safe to crack my knuckles?

Are you knuckle cracker? Do you just enjoy the sound it makes? Is it something you do when you are nervous? Well, have no fear. Cracking those knuckles may be annoying to the people around you but it probably won't raise your risk for arthritis. That's the conclusion of several studies that compared rates of hand arthritis among habitual knuckle-crackers and people who didn't crack their knuckles according to [health.harvard.edu](http://health.harvard.edu).

One of the most convincing bits of evidence suggesting that knuckle cracking is harmless comes from a California physician who reported on an experiment he conducted on himself. Over his lifetime, he regularly cracked the knuckles of only one hand. He checked x-rays on himself after decades of this behavior and found no difference in arthritis between his hands.

The “pop” of a cracked knuckle is caused by bubbles bursting in the synovial fluid — the fluid that helps lubricate joints. The bubbles pop when you pull the bones apart, either by stretching the fingers or bending them backward, creating negative pressure. The origin of most joint noises, such as popping sounds or cracking of the knees when squatting, is uncertain. They may come from the kneecap rubbing on the bones below, or a tendon sliding across an irregular surface. However, in the absence of pain, swelling, or other joint symptoms, these sounds are probably nothing to be concerned about, and there is no reliable way to silence them.

However, even if knuckle cracking doesn't cause arthritis, there's still good reason to let go of your habit. Chronic knuckle-cracking may lead to reduced grip strength. And there are at least two published reports of injuries suffered while people were trying to crack their knuckles.

Ways you can crack down on your knuckle cracking is to first become aware of when and why you're doing it. Is it usually out of nerves or habit? Try deep breathing exercises or playing with a fidget toy instead.

Swapping cracking your knuckles for other stress-reducing strategies like these can help chill you out and reduce the chance of irritating your fingers or friends. If you can't stop cracking your knuckles, consider looking into the symptoms and potential causes of fidgeting.



# BOOST YOUR METABOLISM

## How to maintain a healthy metabolism

Maintaining a healthy metabolism requires a balanced approach that includes regular physical activity, proper nutrition, sufficient hydration and stress management. By understanding the importance of metabolism and adopting lifestyle habits that support its optimal functioning, we can improve our overall health and lead a more vibrant and energetic life.

While some factors that affect our metabolism are outside of our control --including sex, height, and age --there are some things we can do to promote a healthy metabolism. **Here are some healthy lifestyle habits that support and improve your metabolism:**

### 1) Build lean muscle mass

Metabolism is often measured as your Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR), which is the number of calories your body expends at rest to keep your body functioning. Because muscle uses more energy than fat, the leaner muscle mass you have, the higher your BMR will be, and the more calories you'll burn at rest. Increasing your BMR can help you burn extra fat stored in your body if you're trying to lose weight or prevent you from gaining extra weight if you're working on weight maintenance. Learning about bodyweight assessment can really help achieve your workout goals.

### 2) Get plenty of sleep.

The average adult needs between 7-9 hours of sleep a night for optimum health. Not getting the right amount of sleep can cause metabolic and hormonal dysregulation, which leads to weight gain. Also, people who are sleep-deprived are more likely to eat more calories and choose foods that are higher in simple carbohydrates and fats than people who are well-rested.

### 3) Get your thyroid checked

Your thyroid releases hormones that support a healthy metabolism. However, if the thyroid is underactive (a condition called hypothyroidism), your metabolism will be sluggish, which causes weight gain and inhibits weight loss. If you've been eating a well-balanced diet and exercising but you're gaining weight or you're unable to lose weight, a simple blood test can evaluate your thyroid hormones to see if hypothyroidism is to blame.

### 4) Use a standing desk

Standing desks have been shown to improve blood sugar and reduce the neck, shoulder, and back pain people often experience when they're sitting at a desk all day. In addition, using a standing desk burns more calories than sitting. In one study, people who used a standing desk burned 174 calories more in a day than their sedentary counterparts.

## Why metabolism is important

Metabolism is a complex process that occurs within our bodies, influencing how we convert food into energy and maintain essential bodily functions.

Here is how our metabolism impacts various aspects of our health and wellbeing.

### Energy production

At its core, metabolism is responsible for producing the energy needed to power all physiological processes in our bodies. Every cell, tissue and organ rely on energy to function optimally. During metabolism, carbohydrates, fats, and proteins from our diet are broken down and transformed into adenosine triphosphate (ATP), the primary energy currency of cells. This process ensures that our bodies have the necessary energy to perform activities ranging from basic bodily functions to intense physical exertion.

### Hormone regulation

Metabolism plays a crucial role in regulating hormone levels within our bodies. Hormones are chemical messengers that control various physiological processes, including appetite, mood and stress response. An imbalanced metabolism can lead to hormonal disruptions, which may result in weight gain, mood swings and other health issues.

### Nutrient absorption

An efficient metabolism ensures the proper absorption and utilization of nutrients from the food we eat. When metabolism is functioning optimally, our bodies can absorb essential vitamins, minerals and other nutrients

necessary for overall health and wellbeing. On the other hand, a sluggish metabolism may hinder nutrient absorption and lead to deficiencies, potentially compromising various bodily functions.

### Immune system function

Metabolism plays a vital role in supporting a robust immune system. Adequate energy production is essential for immune cells to function optimally and defend against infections and illnesses. An inefficient metabolism can weaken the immune system, making the body more susceptible to infections and slow down the healing process.

### Aging process

Metabolism also plays a role in the aging process. As we age, our metabolism tends to slow down gradually, which can contribute to weight gain and a decrease in energy levels. A healthy lifestyle, including regular physical activity and a balanced diet, can help counteract the effects of a slowing metabolism and promote healthy aging.

### Body composition

Metabolism significantly impacts our body composition, particularly the ratio of muscle to fat. Higher muscle mass leads to a higher resting metabolic rate, as muscle tissue requires more energy to maintain than fat tissue. Regular physical activity, especially strength training exercises, can boost metabolism by increasing muscle mass, aiding in weight management, and promoting a leaner body composition.



## Give a thought to alcohol consumption

Today's health trends all seem to be branded with cool names. Take the term "sober curious" for example. What are people talking about when they use this term? It means someone is thinking about drinking less alcohol or taking a break from it.

Healthline.com explains that sober curious means you've chosen to avoid alcohol for personal or wellness reasons. It involves curiosity about the reasons why you drink, and the way alcohol affects your life. Unlike people who stay sober because of dependency or addiction, sober curious people may not necessarily meet criteria for an alcohol use disorder or intend to give up alcohol permanently.

There is no denying that alcohol is a part of our social culture, and luckily for many of us we can take it or leave it if we feel like it. But according to the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction (CCSA), research shows that no amount or kind of alcohol is good for your health. It doesn't matter what kind of alcohol it is—wine, beer, cider or spirits, drinking alcohol, even a small amount, is damaging to everyone regardless of age, sex, gender, ethnicity, tolerance for alcohol or lifestyle. That's why if you drink, it's better to drink less.

Sober curiosity often begins with some concern about alcohol's impact on your life. It usually involves some questioning of drinking culture and your own patterns of alcohol use. Maybe you need alcohol to get yourself in the mood to socialize or have a drink every night to ease the day's stress. You've noticed, though, that drinking doesn't really do much to address those issues, and you often end up feeling even more anxious.

**Regardless of what gets you thinking about your drinking, drinking less benefits you and others. It reduces your risk of experiencing:**

- Disrupted sleep.
- Digestive issues.
- Memory problems.
- Increased anxiety, depression, and irritability.
- Disagreements and other conflict with loved ones.

The CCSA reminds us that the more alcohol you drink per week, the more the consequences add up. Even three to six drinks per week (that's two beers or two glasses of wine every evening, or half a case of beer on the weekend) can increase your risk of developing several types of cancer.

If you have ever had trouble quitting drinking no matter how much you want to and find that this is impacting your life in a significant way, perhaps it's time to talk with a trusted friend, a counsellor, or your health care provider.

## Better to unite than fight

When you meet people who are different from you, embrace them instead of deciding to dislike them based on their differing perspectives. It will positively impact your life. Here are a few reasons to unite with others rather than pitting yourself against them:

### An open mind

Talking with people from unfamiliar cultures or who have thoughts and opinions that do not match yours gives you the opportunity to learn from them. Remaining receptive to the principles, moral values, cultural norms, and viewpoints of others without necessarily endorsing their ideals will educate you.

### An open heart

If you are hospitable towards people who are not like you, your compassion grows. Despite sometimes radical differences, all humans need food, shelter, clothing, a purpose, mental and emotional stimulation, amusement, love, and each other. There are no exceptions. When you understand that nobody is different from you in that regard, empathy comes naturally. Your heart opens wide.

### More creative collaboration

Suppose you enjoy creating music. You stay where you were born and make music with the same local people your whole life. Now imagine you are a musician who has traveled internationally and made music-orientated friends on your travels. Which of those two situations would allow you to develop your style and taste the most? With an open and inclusive mindset, creative talent develops rapidly. Best of all, it allows you to collaborate and discover bold, fresh, innovative

ideas. Via collaboration, you might create something that positively inspires the entire world.

### Happier relationships

When you want to unite rather than fight with those around you, your attitude remains loving, positive, and curious. Other people can feel that loving energy and will gravitate towards you. If you try to be compassionate, accepting, and inquiring in your interactions with others, you can expect to enjoy happier relationships with all the people who matter most to you.

### A world centric perspective

There are three types of people in the world. Those who think only of themselves are egocentric. People with sympathy towards those who have similar physical characteristics are ethnocentric. If you can extend your empathy to all human beings across the globe, you are world centric.

Look for common ground rather than focusing on the differences. This will help you develop a more world-centric perspective.

### A better social life

When you are prepared to make friends with a broader range of people, your social life cannot help but improve. You will receive invites to join in more social events and activities, which could be new, exciting, and illuminating. The richer your social life is, the more connected you will feel with the people around you. Having strong connections with others boosts your psychological well-being. Nobody is an island. Everybody needs to feel they have a network of people around them to offer love and support.

# Comfort food favourites with health in mind

(NC) As the cold weather sets in, many people will enjoy hearty comfort foods to help them warm up. And with 35% of Canadians reporting that their eating habits have worsened since being asked to stay at home during covid, having healthier alternatives to seasonal comfort food recipes is sure to be a satisfying way to indulge.

**Here are a few simple ways you can feel better about enjoying hearty comfort foods:**

## Switch ingredients

Substitute refined processed foods with more nutrient-rich ingredients. Look to limit red meat with leaner protein and vegetarian options, while swapping out heavier cream elements with whole or skim milk.

## Mix in more veggies

Incorporate in-season fall vegetables



into your recipes. Sweet potatoes, butternut squash and pumpkin are rich in fibre and full of flavour for hearty meals. Chilis, soups and stews are all meals where you can add these kinds of veggies and can also be made without meat and dairy if you're looking for a vegetarian or vegan option. You can also make a leafy green salad.

## Controlled breathing exercises

One of the best relaxation methods out there is entirely free. All you need is a pair of healthy lungs, your breath, and 10 minutes of "me" time. It's called controlled breathing. Controlled breathing exercises can help keep your mind and body in shape, by helping to lower blood pressure, promote feelings of calm and relaxation, and relieve stress.

While the long-term benefits of breathing exercises haven't been studied at length many experts encourage using the breath as a means of increasing awareness and mindfulness. Here are a few expert-approved ways to relax using controlled breathing exercises borrowed from centuries-old yoga and meditation traditions.

### Equal breathing

This breathing exercise, used in yoga exercises, is especially effective before bed and can help take your mind off the racing thoughts or whatever might be distracting you,

How to do it: Begin by sitting or lying down in a comfortable position. Your eyes can be open or closed. Inhale for 4 counts, and then exhale for 4 counts. All inhalations and exhalations should be made through your nose, which adds a slight, natural resistance to your breath. Once you get these basics down, try 6-8 counts per breath.

### Abdominal breathing

The abdominal breathing technique can be really helpful before experiencing a particularly stressful event like taking an exam or giving a big presentation.

How to do it: Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Take a deep breath in through your nose, allowing diaphragm (not your chest) to inflate with enough air to create a slight stretching sensation in your lungs. Slowly exhale. According to physiologist and breathing expert Alison McConnell, taking 6-10 deep, slow breaths per minute for 10 minutes each day using this breathing technique might help reduce your heart rate and blood pressure.

### A quick way to calm down

Take five conscious, deep breaths anytime you feel stress coming on so your body starts to receive the breaths as a signal to calm down. Experts suggest inhaling for three or four seconds and then exhaling for one or two seconds longer.

Whichever breathing exercise you choose, it's best to stick with one, consistent method that works for you.

## energy zone

Mince pies, mulled wine, servings from the cheese platter and candy canes leave many of us stuffed, and sluggish over the holidays, but many traditional Christmas foods are incredibly nutritious. Here are just a few examples:

### Nuts

Every nut has a slightly different nutritional profile, but between them, a handful of nuts bring a host of vitamins, fibre, and good fats. Why not add them to stuffing, sprinkle over salads or roast your own gently to control the process? Admittedly, roasted and salted, or candied, they become more of a treat and less of one of the nutritious superfoods, so watch your intake on those!

### Vegetables

You might think you don't like Brussels sprouts, but that's probably because you haven't had them

## Hidden holiday super foods!



blanched and then lightly fried (in a healthy oil) with sage and chestnuts. The good news is that this cooking method leaves them tasting much better than the overly boiled sprouts you might have tried before, but also preserves their high Vitamin C content. They're also high in fibre, folic acid, and potassium.

Carrots and roasted parsnip can be part of your holiday meal, bringing yet more fibre, folic acid, Vitamin C, and manganese to the table.