The emotional benefits of mindfulness

Being fully in the moment is good for emotional health. It’s also the idea behind an ancient practice called mindfulness. Studies show this practice helps ease stress and depression. It can be a good way for people to calm down when they’re feeling stressed — or move forward when they feel stuck.

Letting worries go

Mindfulness helps people be aware of what’s happening in the present instead of worrying about the past or future. It means accepting every moment, good and bad, without judgment.

It can be as simple as taking a walk. People can become more aware of their breath, their feet on the ground, and the sights and sounds around them. If a worry crops up, that’s OK. Noticing it, then refocusing on the present helps. People can also:

• Sit quietly and repeat a word or phrase, concentrating on natural breathing.
• Focus on how their body feels. People can check in with each part of their body, from head to toe. Notice and welcome all sensations.

Mindfulness takes practice. Try not to be discouraged if it doesn’t come easily at first.

Health care doesn’t take a holiday

It can be easy to overlook medications, health checks and doctor’s appointments at this time of year. People should do their best to stay on track — and reach out to their care manager or doctor if they have any questions or need help.

Sources: www.helpguide.org; National Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov)

More than mindfulness

While it’s a valuable tool, mindfulness isn’t usually enough to relieve depression. Medication and talk therapy are two effective treatments. Anyone who may be depressed should talk to their doctor. If people have thoughts of hurting themselves or others, call 911 right away.
How to make it through the holidays

The holidays can be stressful for the healthiest people. They can prove to be an even tougher time for people with a chronic illness.

People should keep in mind that they can opt out of any holiday events they don’t feel up to attending. It’s OK to say no. When they do take part, they can:

- Let someone else take on hosting duties.
- Plan in advance how they want to spend their time — and with whom.
- Take breaks from the social scene if they feel themselves running low on energy.
- Feeling tired? It’s OK to take a nap.
- Avoid alcohol. It can worsen bad moods or feelings.
- Take care of themselves by eating balanced meals.
- Give themselves permission to express their emotions. People shouldn’t try to force a happy face if they’re really feeling down.
- Try taking a walk when the sun’s out. Gray days can bring on seasonal affective disorder — a type of depression. Getting out in the sun can brighten their mood.
- Get plenty of rest so they have the energy for favorite events.

Keeping in touch

In the bustle of the holidays, people shouldn’t let their health fall by the wayside. Their primary care provider and care manager can answer their questions and point them to tools that make managing their health easier. Those include mobile apps to track blood pressure, cholesterol, medications, daily activity or calories. If people feel stressed or overwhelmed by their health, they should reach out. They’re not alone.

Sources: Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org); American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org); National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org)

Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve

If you are a caregiver, ask your loved one’s care manager about their needed services as well as services you might need as a caregiver. For example, you may feel overwhelmed, sad or burned out. The care manager can provide information and referrals for support.

Get the shot, not the flu

Just about everyone who’s 6 months of age or older needs a flu shot. That’s especially true for people with a chronic illness.

The best time to get a shot is before the flu starts spreading in your community. That’s hard to predict. It’s probably best to get the shot as soon as it’s available in your area.

Remember: You can’t get the flu from a shot. It’s among the best ways to avoid getting the flu.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)