



## DE-STRESS YOUR HOME

With major crises - a pandemic, turmoil and so on - swirling around us, it can seem like we are doomed to live with anxiety. However, while we can't control such mega-stressors, we can ease tension on a smaller scale by focusing on the home front. Following are five ways to lower stress at home.

**Drop stress at the door.** Consciously shake off tensions before walking into your home at the end of the workday, kind of like the way you wipe dirt from your feet on a doormat. Pause, take a few deep breaths and focus on relaxing for your family.

**Share tasks.** Housework can be a big source of stress, especially if one person carries most of the load. Sharing chores reduces stress.

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**Eat together.** Study after study shows that regular family dinners have a positive impact on a wide range of factors - including stress. Make a point of dining together and you'll benefit immeasurably.

**Play together.** Do something fun as a family. It doesn't have to be a major activity or extraordinary outing. Take a walk, play a board game, do a craft project ... just do *something* together and you'll reap rewards.

**Keep communication open.** Ask each other how you're doing. Let others know you're there to listen if they need you. Talk. It works wonders.

## Smart Facts

57%

of American workers feel stress on a daily basis.

42%

of Americans say they don't do enough to manage stress.

70%

of Americans believe "everything will work out" after the pandemic.



## GET MINDFUL IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE

Sometimes, things get so crazy that you need a little mental break. Some people say you need to "Get out of your own head."

Mindfulness would suggest the opposite. It would tell you to pause and look closely but dispassionately inside your head to really see what's happening to you and around you. Or, as WebMD puts it, "Mindfulness is about observing. You notice your life with a little distance, instead of reacting emotionally."

Why do this? Because studies have shown that taking the time to truly be in the moment reduces stress and contributed to better overall health. The good news is that this doesn't mean you have to stop, cross your legs and meditate. On the contrary: Mindfulness can be practiced in virtually any moment in even the most mundane settings. Following are five examples.

**Mindful tooth time.** Use the time when you're brushing your teeth to become aware of your surroundings: the floor under your feet, the smell of toothpaste, the feeling of the brush against your teeth. Focusing on these aspects of this simple practice will nudge stress out of your mind.

**Splash-splash mindfulness.** Too often, shower time is when the day's anxiety's come flooding at us. To block this, slow down and sense the temperature of the water, how the drops feel hitting your skin, the smell of the soap ... and watch stress swirl down the drain.

**Mindful commute.** Instead of driving aggressively, pushing your way into buses and grumbling about the people around you, soak in your commute. Find something pleasant to look at, let sounds come at you individually, focus on whatever you're touching. You'll drive tension away.

**Domestic mindfulness.** Make doing the dishes a special moment by noticing the warmth of the water, the softness of soap bubbles, the texture of the sponge and the sounds you make by scrubbing. You'll end up with clean dishes and a slower heart rate.

**Queue up for mindfulness.** Rather than hating waiting in line, consider it an opportunity to absorb the world around you. Think about the way your body is positioned. Feel your feet in your shoes and the weight of anything you have in your hands. Listen to your breathing. The time will pass more quickly - and more beneficially.

Mindfulness shouldn't be intimidating. You can participate in mindfulness practices - and the benefits they deliver - in small batches in your everyday life. All you have to do is get into your head.



*"Mindfulness is about observing. You notice your life with a little distance, instead of reacting emotionally."*

## WHEN AND HOW TO MAKE CHANGES TO YOUR BENEFITS

While we know we should pay attention to our benefits on an ongoing basis, most of us have a "Set it and forget it" attitude about them. We make choices when we take a job or a new benefit plan comes online, and then we don't think about it much. Sure, when Open Enrollment rolls around, we swear we'll really think about our choices .. and then we often keep what we've got.

But sometimes we become aware of a gap between the benefits we have and the benefits we need. Then what do we do? Here are some things to keep in mind.

**The Annual Opportunity: Open Enrollment.** Each year, benefit plans give enrollees an opportunity to assess their choices and make changes. This typically will be the easiest time to make changes, so take advantage if you think a change is needed. Make time to consider your choices and decide whether what you did last year is what you want to do in the coming year.

**The Qualifying Life Event.** You also can make changes if you've been through what's known as a Qualifying Life Event, or "QLF." These events - such as getting married, having a child, aging out of your parents' health coverage or a change in employment status - allow you to act like you're having your own Open Enrollment period. You can assess your benefits choices and make alterations based on your new reality.

**Rules changes.** Occasionally the government will allow for benefit changes in response to special circumstances. Most recently, rules were changed to accommodate the impact of the pandemic, allowing plan enrollees to make changes they otherwise typically could make only during Open Enrollment or in the case of a QLF.

**Ongoing opportunities.** While the limitations mentioned above apply to most benefits, some elective benefits - such as a 401(k) plans, health savings accounts, flexible spending accounts and more - allow employees to make certain changes any time, regardless of the employer's enrollment schedule or life events.

**Your HR Team is there to help.** Regardless of your reason for making changes, your HR team should be your first point of contact. You might end up making the changes through an HR portal or vendor website, but your HR representative will help you walk through the process so you get the results you need.



### *National Kidney Month*

We don't think about kidneys unless they give us problems ... but we should. They're vital to our overall health. Unfortunately, one in three American adults are at risk for kidney disease, and 100,000 are awaiting transplant. The key to preventing serious kidney problems? Understanding your kidneys and how they work. Learn more [here](#).

# HARVEST OF THE MONTH: KIWIS

If ever a fruit came with a lesson, it would be the kiwi, which teaches us that something that's ugly on the outside can be wonderful on the inside.

Rough, brown and hairy, the kiwi (also known as kiwifruit or Chinese gooseberry) might look unappealing, but its flavor is sweet and refreshing. More important, perhaps, as a source of nutrition, the kiwi is a real beauty, serving up powerful doses of vitamins C and K, antioxidants and other nutrients. In scientific studies, kiwis have been linked to reductions in cancers, better bone health, lower blood pressure and more.

When shopping for kiwis, you'll have better luck judging them by feel than appearance. Certainly, choose ones that are free of blemishes and dents, but, for the best flavor, pick out the ones that give a little when you squeeze them. Harder kiwis will be sourer.



Once you get your kiwis home, you can store them for a day or two in a fruit basket away from sunlight. To keep them longer, store them in the refrigerator, where they'll keep for up to three weeks.



## Recipe: Poblano and Ground Pork Tacos with Kiwi Salsa

### Ingredients (6 servings):

- 1 red onion, halved and thinly sliced
- 1 Roma tomato, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 ripe kiwi, diced
- 1 lime, quartered, divided
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro, divided
- Salt and ground black pepper to taste
- 4 tablespoons sour cream
- Olive oil
- 1 poblano pepper, cored, seeded and finely chopped
- 10 ounces ground pork
- 1 tablespoon Mexican seasoning
- 2 tablespoons chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 6 flour tortillas

### Directions:

Mince a few slices of onion to get 1 tablespoon. Combine in a small bowl with tomato, kiwi, juice from 2 lime wedges,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the cilantro, salt and pepper. In a separate bowl, juice  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the lime and mix in sour cream to make crema. Heat olive oil in a large pan over medium-high heat and cook sliced onion and poblano pepper, tossing occasionally, until softened and lightly charred (3 to 4 minutes). Add pork and Mexican seasoning, then cook until pork is browned throughout (4 to 5 minutes). Reduce heat to medium-low. Add chicken stock, tomato paste, salt and pepper. Cook and stir until everything is coated (1 to 2 minutes). Wrap tortillas in a damp cloth and microwave for 30 seconds. Divide tortillas over plates, and spread cream on top. The top tortillas with pork mixture and salsa. Garnish with remaining cilantro.

### Nutrition Information:

CALORIES: 392; PROTEIN: 15.4; CARBOHYDRATES: 44.5G; FAT: 16.8; SODIUM: 659.7MG; FIBER: 3.7G; SUGARS: 4.5G; CHOLESTEROL: 34.8MG

Sources: Accessed February 3, 2022

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