



HAVE A SAFE COVID-ERA THANKSGIVING.

Here's the bad news: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says typical Thanksgiving celebrations are out for this year. Large gatherings with people from out of town are simply too risky. But, that doesn't mean you can't celebrate Thanksgiving. It just means it will have to be different. Here are some ideas for making it work:

Keep it small. The CDC says the risk of spreading the virus increases with the number of people in a gathering. Plan for a small gathering.

Take it outdoors. Yes, it might be chillier than you like, but taking your celebration outdoors gives you an opportunity to do something festive and creative ... and safe.

Get tested. Ask anyone who might have been exposed to the virus to get tested before getting together.

Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>. Accessed 5 October 2020.
<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/can-i-visit-family-for-thanksgiving-or-christmas-your-pandemic-holiday-travel-questions-answered-2020-09-17>. Accessed 5 October 2020.

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Beat Holiday Stress
- 3 What To Ask During Open Enrollment
- 4 Harvest Of The Month: Sweet Potatoes

Say "no" if you're feeling sick. If you or someone in your family is under the weather, pass along regrets rather than running the risk of passing along the virus.

Set boundaries. Make sure everyone attending your gathering understands the expectations for social distancing, wearing masks and more.

Leverage technology. A Zoom meal won't be the same as having everyone around the same table, but it will be safer ... and you can still share stories, tell jokes and argue about politics.

Smart Facts

55 MILLION

people planned to travel 50 miles or more last Thanksgiving.

75%

is the decline in some airlines' typical bookings for November flights (as of late September).

100 MILLION

is the amount lost a day by airlines during the height of pandemic lockdowns.



DONT LET HOLIDAY STRESS GET YOU DOWN .

To say 2020 has been stressful would be an understatement. But, the fun of the holidays will help ease some of the stress, right? Um, not likely. Even in a typical year, nearly 9 out of 10 Americans report being stressed during the holidays. COVID-19 restrictions only threaten to make matters worse. Still, you can have a lower-stress holiday season, if you're willing to take conscious steps to lower your stress. The good news? The steps are easy to take. Following are some ideas.

Get outside. Fresh air and sunshine will almost always boost your spirits. Take the time to breathe deeply and soak up the sun.

Sniff a little aromatherapy. Enlist your sense of smell to help you feel better. A nice whiff of citrus can help to give you fresh energy, and the aromas of the season – cinnamon, baking smells, candles – can evoke happy memories.

Exercise. The body and brain are connected. Moving your body will move your mood.

Plan. A lot of holiday stress comes from feeling a lack of control. Fend that off by creating a schedule, measuring out your responsibilities and planning for downtime.

Talk. Nothing creates holiday stress like family tension. Dodge those dinner-table tantrums by connecting before the holidays and ironing out differences with reasonable conversations.

Laugh. Make time for levity. Watch a funny movie, be silly with your kids, talk with friends who make you laugh ... whatever it takes to give you the giggles.

Say "no." One of the biggest sources of holiday stress is overcommitting ... to get-togethers, volunteer opportunities, helping out, and more. Learn to say "no" and you'll say "yes" to lower stress.

Manage expectations ... especially yours. Don't expect the perfect holiday. It rarely happens. Set reasonable expectations of everyone – especially yourself – and everybody will be less stressed.

Eat better. There is a great temptation to eat poorly during the holidays, but that sweet and heavy food often just generates stress and guilt. Focus on healthful foods and indulge only moderately in the sweet or fatty stuff.

Get quiet. Find time to quiet down, breathe deeply and simply relax. You can literally lower your heart rate and lower your stress level by consciously focusing on being quiet.

Sources: <https://www.health.com/mind-body/25-ways-to-fight-holiday-stress?slide=6652e375-1843-4125-950d-013a1130fd88#6652e375-1843-4125-950d-013a1130fd88>. Accessed 5 October 2020.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/smart-habits-highly-successful-people/200912/7-tips-relieve-holiday-stress>. Accessed 5 October 2020.



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BEFORE YOU SIGN: SMART OPEN ENROLLMENT QUESTIONS .

Even with all of the turmoil of COVID-19, we can still rely on a few constants: Temperatures will drop in the days ahead, our caloric intake will rise over the next couple of months, and your HR team will distribute information about "Open Enrollment," the annual ritual of signing up for employee benefits.

Unfortunately, a lot of people will push aside those flyers and emails and, without much thought, check "No Change" on benefit enrollment forms. The problem is those employees might be missing out on money-saving options or a better benefits package. To avoid those mistakes, ask your HR team some direct questions. The following list is a good place to start.

What has changed? That might seem like an obvious question, but too many employees assume the answer is "Nothing," even if the HR team has said repeatedly that changes have been made. Make sure you understand how plan changes might affect cost and benefits for you and your family.

Are my caregivers still in-network? Networks and physician affiliations change all the time. Your insurer should keep its online list of in-network providers updated, but touch base with your HR team to check for any changes not reflected on the insurer site.

Any new coverage options? Employers often add plan options to trim costs, help employees save money or improve coverage options. Make sure you consider any plan additions or changes that could offer a better option for you and your family.

Have changes in my life affected the choices I should make? Did you add any kids to your family this year? Did your spouse get a new job? Did you have a major health crisis? These and other life events could affect your options.

Any changes to the plan due to telehealth? Telehealth and other forms of virtual care are increasing, and your plan provisions might be affected.

Can the HR team help me find ways to save money? Your HR team understands that you want to get the best bang for your buck, and they might see money-saving options you're overlooking, or they might see mistakes you're making in your selections. Either way, they can be a great resource.

To build on that last point, keep in mind that your HR team cannot tell you what choices to make, but they should be happy to explain your options so you can make an informed decision that gives you and your family the best benefits for the best price.

Sources: <https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/benefits/Pages/health-plan-questions.aspx>. Accessed 5 October 2020.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/learnvest/2015/10/02/make-the-most-of-open-enrollment-season-by-asking-these-8-questions/#2b883b70291c>. Accessed 5 October 2020.



Great American Smokeout, Nov. 19

Studies show that about 70% of smokers want to quit, but it's just not that easy. The Great American Smokeout encourages those who want to quit to quit for just one day ... and then see what's possible. With nearly a half million people dying of smoking-related deaths each year, it's a step worth taking. Learn more at <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/great-american-smokeout.html>

HARVEST OF THE MONTH: SWEET POTATOES

People who grow sweet potatoes can be forgiven for bragging about their crop: Food scientists have ranked it as the healthiest vegetable you can eat. In fact, the Center for Science in the Public Interest gave the sweet potato more than double the nutritional-value score of the baked potato, spinach or broccoli.

Why the high score? Well, for one thing, sweet potatoes are packed with vitamins A, B6 and C, they have loads of fiber, beta-carotene, iron and potassium, and they're virtually fat- and sodium-free.

Of course, they also taste great.

If you want to get the most from these orange nutrition bombs, choose ones that are firm and relatively free of blemishes – accepting, of course, that these are roots, so they might appear dirty or a little “gnarly” in the store. They'll be best if you eat them within a few days, although they can be stored up to a month. But don't refrigerate them before cooking, because that could diminish the flavor. Instead, keep them in a cool, well-ventilated area.

When it is time to prepare them, wash and dry the sweet potatoes, and then cook and eat them with the skin on. The skin adds to the nutritious punch these roots deliver.



Source: <https://garberfarm.com/sweet-potato-facts>. Accessed 5 October 2020.



Recipe: Sweet potato and black bean quinoa bake

Ingredients:

- 4 cups sweet potatoes (½-inch cubes)
- 1 15 oz. can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup uncooked quinoa, rinsed
- 1 cup frozen corn, thawed
- 2 cups vegetable broth
- 1 tsp. chili powder
- 2 tsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. garlic salt
- ½ tsp. dried thyme
- ½ cup green onions, chopped

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375°. Combine all ingredients except green onions in a 9”x13” baking dish sprayed with cooking oil and bake, covered with foil, for 45 minutes. Remove foil and continue baking for additional 15 to 20 minutes, until liquid is mostly absorbed and potatoes are tender. Remove from oven and let casserole sit for five minutes so any remaining liquid can be absorbed. Sprinkle with green onions and serve.

Nutrition Information:

**CALORIES: 273; FAT: 2.5; CARBS: 55.8G; DIETARY FIBER: 10G;
SODIUM: 991.8MG; SUGAR: 6.6G; PROTEIN: 11G**

Source: <https://www.eatyourselfskinny.com/sweet-potato-black-bean-quinoa-bake/>. Accessed 5 October 2020.