

City of Tampa Healthy Heartbeat



December 2023

Healthier Ways for the Holidays

The holidays can be a challenging time to stay healthy – both physically and mentally. With holiday parties full of decadent food and drinks and busy schedules that may not allow time for our normal routines, we might find it difficult to make healthier decisions.

This can also be a time of year that brings extra stress. Overbooked schedules, spending time with difficult family members, dealing with loss, and overspending on holiday gifts may all lead to increased tension. With a little forethought and planning, however, it is possible to embrace and enjoy the holiday season.

[Click here](#) to read the full "Healthier Ways for the Holidays" article, filled with tips and tricks on healthier holiday eating, budget friendly holiday spending, and just generally coping with holiday stress!

The Gift of SELF CARE...

It's a popular meme on social media, especially around the holidays, that saying that goes, "Take care of yourself first – you can't pour from an empty cup."

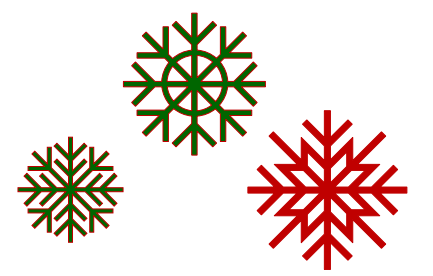
As part of your regular United Healthcare benefits through the City of Tampa, you have access to a website: www.LiveAndWorkWell.com This site is FULL of wonderful information and tools that can help you manage your health and well-being and learn to take good care of YOU. You'll find **resources on coping with stress**, you'll **learn about relevant and trending mental and emotional health topics** from newly published articles, trainings, and tip sheets, you'll find **on-demand resources for coping** during times of crisis, traumatic events, natural disasters, grief and loss, and supporting youth in need.

HR professionals and Managers can access specially curated resources and tools to help you provide support to employees, communicate effectively, and navigate workplace issues and concerns.

To explore the full website, go to www.LiveAndWorkWell.com and sign up, or **browse as a guest** using the code: **Tampa**.

Why Giving Is Good for Your Health

Helping others can boost your heart and mind



We all know that giving helps others. But did you know that warm, fuzzy feeling you get from helping others is actually good for you, too? That's not just some "good vibe" theory, either; **there's science behind it**. Research shows that giving can boost your physical and mental health in numerous ways.

There's a chemical response that takes place in your body in reaction to ... well, just doing something nice. As you help someone or give a gift, **your brain secretes "feel good" chemicals** like Serotonin, Dopamine, and Oxytocin. When we do things for other people, it makes us feel more engaged and joyful, which is **good for our health and happiness!**



Some of the health benefits associated with giving or serving include lower blood pressure, decreased stress, and a longer lifespan. To read the full article: [Why Giving Is Good for Your Health \(clevelandclinic.org\)](http://www.clevelandclinic.org)

Holiday stress? Try Planning, Practice and Positivity

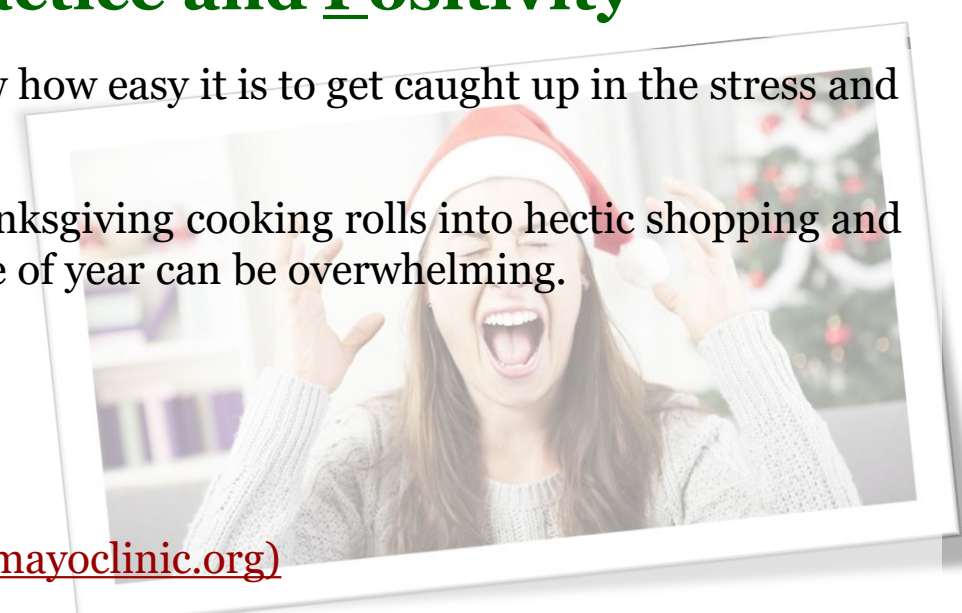
The holiday season is upon us once again, and we all know how easy it is to get caught up in the stress and chaos of it all.

Already demanding lives become even more hectic as Thanksgiving cooking rolls into hectic shopping and preparation for holiday events. For many people, this time of year can be overwhelming.

To read the full article and learn how you can...

1. Make a **PLAN** for the holidays,
2. Learn to **PRACTICE** holiday resilience, and
3. Overcome changes with **POSITIVITY**

Just follow this link: [Tips for dealing with holiday stress \(mayoclinic.org\)](http://www.mayoclinic.org)



The Gift of Kindness

Some days just get the best of us.

Traffic is horrible, your project is running late, the boss is disappointed... The list goes on and on and it can be hard to feel happy when it seems like there are so many factors working against us.

The good news? There's an easy way to boost your mood that's completely within your control. And - plot twist - it involves **boosting someone else's mood first!**

We all have a story about how being nice to someone made us feel good. Now, **science is beginning to help us understand why**. For example, one British study found that when people aged 18 to 60 carried out **random acts of kindness every day** for 10 days, they reported **higher life satisfaction** than those who didn't.

Using brain imaging, researchers found that receiving money increases activity in the brain's reward system. The same area of the brain that releases feel-good chemicals when stimulated by food or sex. But that's not all. Donating to a charity also had the same effect. In other words, **both giving and receiving kindness can produce a natural high**.

I know what you're thinking: "If you have money to donate, of course donating money feels good!" But here's the thing, **you don't have to spend money to reap the benefits of being nice**. Kindness doesn't have to cost a thing. Kindness: It's a win-win!

In keeping with the spirit of the holidays, follow the link below to learn **7 simple ways to spread joy and kindness and make someone's day** – including your own!

[7 Easy Ways to Make Someone's Day \(Including Your Own!\) | Optum Wellbeing](#)
(Enter code "Tampa")

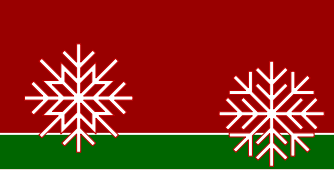


Understanding Financial Well-Being

Stress about money and finances can have a significant impact on Americans' lives. Nearly 72% of adults report feeling **stressed about money** at least some of the time, and nearly 25% say they experience extreme stress about money.

Follow the link below for an informative article that discusses **5 fundamentals of financial well-being**, including tips for budgeting, saving, planning for retirement, how to monitor your credit score, and more:

[Financial well-being | UnitedHealthcare \(uhc.com\)](http://www.uhc.com)



Healthy Holiday Eating Made Easy!

No Need to Sacrifice Taste or Tradition

Healthy eating during the holidays can seem like an impossible task! From Thanksgiving onward, many of us center our festivities around tables full of buttery hi-fat dishes, plentiful desserts, and free-flowing alcohol.

Jennifer Welper, wellness executive chef at Mayo Clinic has tips to help us navigate the holidays in a healthier way. But she's not interested in forbidding cookies or throwing out Grandma's beloved sweet potato casserole recipe! "...people come together over food", she says, "You want to make sure that you don't completely strip holiday dishes of what they were meant to be".

Here are some of Chef Jen's strategies to make sure you don't feel sluggish, overfed, and sugared-out over the holidays!

Add, don't subtract:

Holiday spreads tend to be full of savory, creamy, and fatty foods. Add something light and fresh – like a lightly dressed salad, a fancy fruit plate, or a vinegar-based slaw. You might be surprised how quickly those lighter dishes are snatched up!

When it comes to appetizers, you can still offer the meatballs and chicken wings, but also offer lighter dishes like veggie platters, lettuce wraps, or a fresh black bean and corn salsa. And don't forget about the fruit!

Make the healthy options easy to eat. For instance, Chef Jen has noticed that people don't touch the clementines when she serves them with the peel still on. But when pre-peeled... "People will eat those like candy!", she says.

Take vegetables to the next level:

"A big thing I tell people to focus on: Make the vegetables delicious!", Chef Jen says, even if that means relying on ingredients that are a little less healthy, like cheese, or honey, to punch up the taste.

"Even if it's Parmesan Cauliflower – with a generous amount of Parmesan – "...if you have half a plate of cauliflower, you're still eating half a plate of cauliflower. Where before it might have been more gravy, another bun, or mashed potatoes", she says.

Other ideas for delicious vegetable dishes include balsamic-glazed Brussels sprouts, or sauteed carrots in honey. These recipes can be found in Chef Jen's cookbook *Cook Smart, Eat Well*.

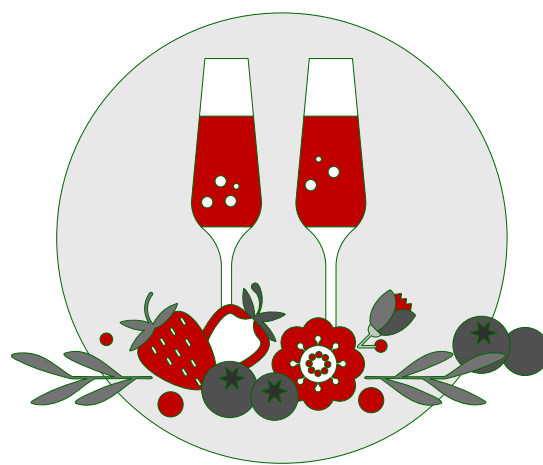
Scale back on the booze:

Alcoholic drinks can pack a lot of calories, and excessive drinking can contribute to a slew of health problems. Plus, a hangover is the last thing you want if you're hosting overnight guests or expecting busy mornings with children.

If you're looking to limit or eliminate booze this holiday season, there's a wide selection of nonalcoholic beers, wines, and cocktails at grocery and liquor stores that can be enjoyed in social settings. Or make your own mocktails, like these:

- **Champagne Fooler** – Mix 2C unsweetened apple juice or apple cider, 1 ½ tsp fresh lemon juice, and 2C lemon sparkling water. Pour into chilled glasses. Serves 4. Each serving: 57 calories and 12 grams sugar.
- **Cranberry Spritzer** – In a large pitcher, mix 1 quart reduced-calorie cranberry juice, ½ C fresh lemon juice, 1-quart carbonated water, ¼ C sugar and 1C raspberry sherbet. Pour into tall, chilled glasses and garnish with lemon or lime wedges. Serves 10, each serving: 100 calories and 200 grams sugar.

If you do choose to drink alcohol, Chef Jen suggests having a glass of water between alcoholic drinks. This can rehydrate you and increase feelings of fullness, so you don't indulge in quite as many calories.



Enjoy your dessert:

With dessert, Chef Jen recommends enjoying your favorites in moderation. Modifying a dessert to make it *healthier* may just lead you to overindulge. "The moment you start making a dessert "healthier", you give it a halo effect, and then you'll have a second piece", she says. "In terms of calories, fat, and sugar content, by the time you have the second piece, you might just as well have had one unaltered one."

So enjoy the tradition and nostalgia of certain desserts and dishes – but in moderation, she says.

Substitute or alter when possible:

In other cases, you can make easy substitutions without sacrificing taste. Using lean ground beef, or halving a ground beef recipe with ground turkey or chicken, is one example. And you might find that other recipes don't need quite as much butter or sugar as the recipe calls for. "If you usually make your green beans with a stick of butter, try making them with half a stick instead", she says.

Slow and steady:

Remember, eating healthy over the holidays is not about self-denial or overhauling tradition. In fact, an all-or-nothing mentality may encourage you to overindulge. You may think, "I'll start eating better in the new year..." It's often more realistic to focus on gradual improvements and celebrate with small wins!

Resource: Mayo Clinic Health Letter, December 2023 MCPress.MayoClinic.org/HealthLetter

If the recipe calls for:	Try substituting with:
Butter, margarine, oil, shortening	Baked: sub out half with pureed low-fat cottage cheese, mashed banana, prune, or pumpkin puree, or fat-free yogurt. Stovetop cooking: sautee in broth instead of oil, use heart healthy oil like olive or canola. If using spray oil, remember to lower the temperature.
Sugar	Baking: try reducing the amount by 1/3 to ½. To boost sweetness when reducing sugar, add spices such as cinnamon, cloves, or nutmeg or flavorings like vanilla or almond. In place of sugar, try honey or sugar substitutes, such as sucrose or sucralose.
Salt	Baking: reduce the salt by up to half (does not apply to yeast-leavened items, such as bread) Cooking or frying: use herbs & spices or try adding lemon or lime juice. Add the salt toward the end of food preparation to keep the flavor from fading and try to use sparingly/in moderation.





Shifting Your Thinking Patterns to Reduce Stress and Anxiety

The holidays are generally wonderful, and many people say it's their favorite time of the year. But who of us hasn't at least once let out a tired sigh and complained about the extra stress it can sometimes bring? When we go through something stressful or when we're feeling anxious, negative thoughts can make difficult situations and feelings seem even harder. That's because **how we think affects how we feel, and how we feel affects how we behave.**

Learning how to **get ahead of unhelpful thoughts and reframing them to be more positive** can help you get through those moments. It also can help improve your overall mental and emotional wellbeing. While we generally can't control the thoughts that come into our minds, we can control what we do with them. And **we can train ourselves to alter our thinking patterns to be more helpful.**

First, let's consider the **kinds of negative thinking** that may affect you. Here are some common ones:

- ❖ Expecting the worst to happen
- ❖ Focusing on the negative
- ❖ Seeing things as only "good" or "bad"
- ❖ Making negative assumptions
- ❖ Blaming yourself when bad things happen

In each of those thinking patterns, we aren't considering the positive possibilities and variety of perspectives. We're also probably not considering the full story or thinking about the facts. Many factors contribute and come into play in every situation.

Try to pay attention to where your brain goes in a difficult time. If you find yourself getting trapped in one of these unhelpful thinking patterns, **ask yourself questions to center your thoughts and see other perspectives.**

For example:

- ❖ Why am I so worried about this? Has this happened before? If yes, how did I manage that situation? If no, how likely is it to happen in this situation? And if it does, what can I do to get through it?
- ❖ Are there other reasons or explanations this could have happened? For example, maybe my friend's partner does not feel well, so they need to reschedule dinner. Or, I failed that test because I didn't prepare properly, but I am prepared for this test – and I've passed many more tests than I've failed.
- ❖ If someone I cared about were in this situation, what would I tell them? Would I be as hard on them as I am on myself?

Another way to reconsider unhelpful thoughts is to go through this step-by-step exercise.

Ask yourself:

- ❖ Why am I stressed and/or having anxious thoughts? What happened?
- ❖ What unhelpful thoughts am I having?
- ❖ How do those thoughts make me feel?
- ❖ What evidence supports these unhelpful thoughts?
- ❖ What evidence challenges these unhelpful thoughts?
- ❖ Based on the evidence, what is a more helpful, realistic and/or balanced way to think about this?

Now take a deep breath, let the other perspective sink in, and reset.

Going through these reframing processes can help you **feel calmer in the moment and shift your thinking patterns over time to be more positive.** With practice, **thinking more positively can become part of your life** – and help improve your overall mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

Read the full article and find other resources here: [Learn how to shift your thinking patterns to reduce stress and anxiety | Optum Wellbeing](#)

BONUS: Just about any stress management tip list you scan will guide you to get enough sleep, eat nutritious foods, move your body, and take time to relax and connect with people you enjoy. For many of us, that sounds great – if only we had the time. This **free worksheet will help you determine where you can find more time.** Even **15 minutes here or there can add up** to a stress-reducing difference. [Reducing stress: 5 steps to streamline your to-dos](#)

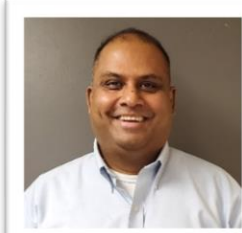
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Wishing you a happy,
healthy, and peaceful
holiday season!
~ your UHC Onsite
Team

For information on City of Tampa
benefits, visit the **Worksite
Wellness** page at www.tampa.gov

From Coach Stef: A Success Story!

Congratulations to City of Tampa employees Arleen & Scott Charlton!



Arleen & Scott **wanted to quit tobacco** before their wedding on June 17th, 2023. Arleen, a smoker of 44 years, reached out to me for assistance. During our initial consultation, we discussed keys to quitting tobacco, and designed a **personalized path** to increase their chances of success.

One of the keys to quitting is to focus on motivators.

To strengthen motivation and prevent relapse, the couple established a bank account to divert money previously used for tobacco into a fund for a honeymoon. **As a result, they saved over \$2000!**

Another key to quitting tobacco is to use NRT (Nicotine Replacement Therapy). These medications are safe and effective and may help smokers to quit and stay quit when used properly. Arleen & Scott acquired **FREE NRT through the CareATC Wellness Center.**

Identifying triggers and potential roadblocks, such as stress, is another key to quitting. Awareness is the first step to change! Through multiple coaching sessions, we collaborated to find solutions. I am so excited to share that **Arleen & Scott successfully quit smoking, got married in June, and continue to be tobacco free!!! Way to go newlyweds!!!**

If you're looking for support in quitting tobacco, know that you are not alone. There are resources available to assist you in a successful quit. For a first step, reach out to Coach Stef at **(813) 535-0482** or COTCoach@UHC.com

Here are a couple of additional resources that you might find helpful:

- How to Quit Smoking, CDC:
<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/quit-smoking/index.html>
- Cost Savings calculator: <https://smokefree.gov/quit-smoking/why-you-should-quit/how-much-will-you-save>
- <https://tobaccofreeflorida.com/>

VA Caregiver Support Program

Are you a caregiver for a Veteran? The **Veteran's Administration Caregiver Support Program (CSP)** might be a good resource for you. The program's mission is to promote the health and well-being of family caregivers who care for our Nation's Veterans, through education, resources, support, and services. For information, visit:
[VA Caregiver Support Program Home](#)

