



SET YOUR SIGHTS ON "STRESS-LESS" HOLIDAYS

by B. Kay Sugg

By all accounts, 2020 has been a difficult year marked by stress and hardships due to the Covid-19 pandemic and compounded by months of being stuck at home. Many just want to finish this year in the hopes that 2021 will be far better. Holidays are also stressful for many people who struggle with depression, loss, and loneliness.

The holidays are a time when we need to make special effort to put our mental health first, and take advantage of the opportunity to rest, celebrate what matters to us, and recharge ourselves. This year in particular, we want to focus on how we can experience less stress and more happiness during the holidays—even if our celebrations are downsized. Below are some practical tips for minimizing stress and boosting your happiness this holiday season.



Get Rid of Clutter

Housekeeping tasks may have been relaxed during the pandemic—resulting in more clutter since family members are at home. Clean up your house. It will be more welcoming and will boost your mood considerably. People are happier when their surroundings are orderly and harmonious.

Exercise

Find time each day for a little exercise. It will have a positive impact on your emotional well-being. According to a study by psychologists at Iowa State University, even a 12-minute brisk walk is a powerful mood booster.

Welcome Sunshine

Spend at least 15 minutes in the sun each day. It makes your skin produce vitamin D, helps your body produce serotonin (which regulates mood and feelings of happiness), and helps relieve SAD (seasonal affective disorder—depression related to changes in seasons).

Laugh a Lot

Laughter causes our bodies to produce endorphins, the feel-good hormones that can boost our happiness. Watch funny videos, comedy specials on tv, or even read a joke book or share funny memories with family members.

Enjoy Music

Whether listening to holiday music or streaming your favorites, enjoy music while completing household tasks, cooking, cleaning, or reading. It calms and contributes to a happier mood.

Get Enough Sleep

You don't have to complete all your holiday tasks at one time. Forget perfection. Set a fixed time to go to bed (set alarm clock to ring 15 min. before) and stick to it. You will be ready for the next day's activities and happier because you are rested and not overwhelmed.

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Permission to Eat

Give yourself permission to eat what you want at the main holiday meal. You will be happier, and one meal where you make unhealthy choices does not spoil anything. You can reset by going back to healthy eating habits the next day.

Aroma Therapy

Certain fragrances contribute to making us feel calmer and happier. Orange, grapefruit, lemon, lavender, vanilla, and peppermint are all uplifting scents. Light more candles containing these fragrances during the holidays.

Reach Out

Take the opportunity to seek out conversation or participate in online groups, social media, or online community events. It helps to call, text, or video chat with others when feeling isolated or lonely, and you may find that you are bringing sunshine and welcome companionship to them as well.

Sources:

The Mayo Clinic, mayoclinic.org

The American Institute of Stress (AIS), stress.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), nami.org

ROASTED GRAPE CROSTINI WITH BRIE AND FRESH THYME



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit with racks in the top third and lower third of the oven. Line a large rimmed baking sheet and a small rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper for easy cleanup.
2. Brush olive oil lightly over both sides of each slice of bread. Arrange the future toasts in a single layer on the large baking sheet. Remove all stems from the grapes. Transfer the grapes to the small baking sheet; toss them with about 1 tablespoon olive oil and then season them with a light sprinkle of salt and pepper.
3. Place the grapes on the upper oven rack and the toasts on the lower. Set the timer for 20 minutes. Keep an eye on the toasts; they will be ready to remove from the oven around the halfway mark, once they are nice and golden on top. Let the grapes roast for the full 20 minutes and maybe a few minutes longer. They're done when they're tender and their skins are lightly wrinkled.
4. Slice the brie into long, ¼-inch wide strips, then slice them into smaller strips to fit the crostini (leave the waxy rind on, it's edible). Top each toast with enough brie to roughly cover the surface, followed by grapes. Finish the crostini with a light sprinkle of pepper and fresh thyme leaves.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 small loaf of crusty whole grain bread, sliced into ½-inch slices
- 1 pound seedless red grapes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, give or take
- ¼+ pound wedge of brie
- 1 to 2 sprigs of fresh thyme
- Freshly ground pepper, to taste
- Salt, to taste

Source: *Kathryne Taylor (cookieandkate.com).*

Check out her cookbook, *Love Real Food: More Than 100 Feel-Good Vegetarian Favorites to Delight the Senses and Nourish the Body* on Amazon!