



Nourish

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Mindful Holidays: Simple Ways to Stress Less and Eat Well



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Between work, raising kids and caring for parents, the holidays can add extra stress for many of us. November and December are filled with a variety of events, but with a few strategies, we can manage stress more effectively.

Stop and think about the events that trigger stress for you. Then, focus on one or two things with these ideas:

- **Know how much money you plan to spend during the holiday season.** Remember to set a budget and then stick to it.
- **Ask for help.** We have many things to accomplish during the holiday season. Remember, you do not need to do them all yourself – share the load with family members. Host a potluck instead of doing all the work yourself.
- **Be organized.** We all have many things to keep on track. Be sure to make lists of events and tasks that need to get done.
- **Set limits on your time.** Say “no” to requests that are not a priority for you.
- **Set realistic expectations.** No family is perfect or has the “perfect holiday,” so don’t put unnecessary pressure on yourself. Instead, focus on the traditions that are most special to you and your family.

Taking care of your body is one way to lower stress, too. Nutritious comfort foods, like soup, can help you feel full and nourished during busy days of early winter. Foods rich in liquid make us feel full more quickly.

Round out a soup-based meal with whole-grain bread, sliced apples or pears and low-fat or fat-free milk. See the many **resources**, including recipes and tips, on North Dakota State University Extension’s Field to Fork website.

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Question

I eat more when I am stressed. I feel like one of the “Golden Girls” from the old TV show who turned to cheesecake when in distress. I have heard about something called “mindful eating.” How could I apply this during the holidays when food is at every turn?

While eating pie, ice cream and cookies might comfort you in the short term, using food as a reward or pick-me-up is not a long-term strategy for good health. In fact, you might feel worse about the situation and guilty about all the calories you just consumed.

Research has shown that stress can increase amounts of stress hormones, including cortisol. This might make you crave pie, cookies and other foods that give a quick (but not sustained) burst of energy.

So, what can you do? Try these mindful eating techniques based on the workshops of Michelle May, cofounder of The Center for Mindful Eating, and the work of Melinda Smith and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D., who teach about emotional eating.

- Ask yourself the questions in Dr. May’s “Mindful Eating Cycle.”
 - Why do I eat?
 - When do I want to eat?
 - What do I eat?
 - How much do I eat?
 - Where do I invest my energy?
- Pause and reflect. Rate your hunger on a 10-point scale (0 = very hungry; 10 = very full). Does your body need to be fed at this instant? Can you wait 5 minutes to eat?
- Consider the reason you are eating. Are you eating for emotional reasons or physical ones? Try to figure out why you are tempted by this piece of pie and plate of cookies
 - If you are thirsty, have a glass of water with a twist of lemon or a cup of herbal tea. Sometimes thirst can masquerade as hunger.
 - If you are worried about something, turn on some music and dance, take a warm bath to relax or take a brisk walk.
 - If you are bored, work on a craft or read a magazine or book.
 - If you are tired, take a break or even a nap.
- If you really are physically hungry, start with a healthful snack such as some apple slices, carrot sticks, yogurt, a mozzarella cheese stick or some whole grain crackers to take the edge off your hunger before the main course.



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Red Lentil Soup with Butternut Squash, Coconut Milk and Curry

- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 2 cups dry red lentils
- 2 cups butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cubed into ½- to 1-inch pieces
- 4 cups reduced-sodium or no-salt-added chicken stock or broth
- 1 (14-ounce) can lower-fat, unsweetened coconut milk
- 1 (15-ounce) can diced, no-salt-added tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon curry powder (or to your preferences)
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper (optional)

Heat oil in a Dutch oven or large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and cook until tender. Add garlic after onion is tender and cook for an additional 30 seconds. Stir in remaining ingredients. Cover and bring ingredients to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for about 15 minutes or until the squash and lentils are tender.

Makes six servings. Each serving has 200 calories, 6 grams (g) fat, 9 g protein, 29 g carbohydrate, 8 g fiber and 580 milligrams sodium.