Bite-Sized Resilience: Three Good Things

Will thinking of three good things each day make you significantly happier? Research demonstrates that it can, according to Bryan Sexton, Ph.D., director of Duke’s Patient Safety Center. Here’s what to do: Every night for two weeks ask yourself, “What are three good things that happened today, and what was my role in them?” Ideally you do this right before your head hits the pillow or at least within two hours of bedtime. That’s it.

This popular resilience activity is a powerful psychological intervention notably associated with better mood and sleep quality. Three Good Things has even demonstrated results not very much different from Prozac. Dr. Sexton refers to the work of renowned psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman, who devised the method. In 2005, a study by Dr. Seligman found that people who did the exercise for only a single week had significantly higher scores for happiness and significantly lower scores for depression — even six months later.

Why does it work? “We’re hard-wired as human beings to remember the negative,” explains Dr. Sexton, “and negative memories are more resilient to fatigue than positive ones.” But focusing on the negative is a survival strategy that often becomes counterproductive. When our thoughts are filled with worry about the past and future at the expense of the present, we may experience burnout and depression. Doing Three Good Things helps to short circuit this tendency toward negative thought. The exercise retrains your brain so that you can remember the positive and your role in bringing it about.

If you try Three Good Things, you might start noticing positive things during the day that you can refer to that night. Beware the pitfalls of transitioning from weekday to weekend and vice versa, as you strive to do the exercise each night for two weeks. Put a post-it note on your bedside table to remind you. You can support others and reinforce your own efforts by sharing Three Good Things with friends, colleagues or family members. The method is so simple that you can teach it to kids as well. Though lasting benefits can be achieved after only two weeks, you may choose to continue the practice indefinitely.
Get Moving challenge: Get your New Year off to a healthy start

The annual employee health competition returns on January 11, 2016. Faculty and staff can join as individuals or form teams of five to eleven colleagues to see who can take the most steps, exercise the most minutes and lose the most weight. Participants in Get Moving will have access to a variety of online tips and information, including how to safely lose weight during the competition. LIVE FOR LIFE staff will provide weekly emails with workout routines, healthy recipes and inspirational tips. For more information, visit http://www.hr.duke.edu/benefits/wellness/getmoving/index.php.

Eat your veggies

You probably grew up hearing your parents say, “Eat your vegetables!” As kids, many of us resist this advice, but mom and dad were right.

Decades of research link eating veggies with a wide variety of health benefits. Plant-based meals tend to contain more fiber, higher amounts of vitamins C and E and less cholesterol and saturated fat than meat-based dishes. Numerous studies indicate that reducing the amount of meat you eat may lower the risk of diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

So what’s a dedicated carnivore to do? Here are some simple strategies for cutting back on meat and incorporating more vegetables into your diet:

- Simply reduce the amount of meat used in a recipe, and replace it with veggies. For example, for a family pizza night, instead of topping your pizzas with sausage, hamburger and pepperoni, choose one of the three. Replace the other two meats with veggies like olives and mushrooms. Add a salad of fresh greens and eat it first before diving into your pie.

- Prepare vegetarian versions of a favorite meal. If you love burritos, experiment with filling your tortilla with beans, which are a fiber-filled source of protein. Then add rice and a variety of veggies, such as sautéed onions and peppers, fresh salsa, spinach, and cucumbers

- Experiment with popular plant-based alternatives to meat such as tempeh, tofu or seitan in a dish you make often. For example, if lasagna or spaghetti with meat sauce is on the menu, crumble tempeh into your marinara and skip the ground beef. Take a chance on a veggie burger or bean burger recipe with all of the trimmings you usually have with a beef burger. Or, replace the chicken used in your stir fry with cubed firm tofu.

Get easy access to local produce and more all year-round through the Duke Mobile Market. See page 6 of this newsletter for more information or visit http://www.hr.duke.edu/benefits/wellness/mobilemarket/index.php.

You can also learn more about what you should eat to optimize your health with a nutrition consult. See page 6 of this newsletter for details or call LIVE FOR LIFE at 919-684-3136 for more information.
Take charge of your holiday spending

The January credit card blues—most of us have experienced them. We spend more during the holidays than we intend and start the new year stressed out about how to regain our financial footing. When you’re spreading cheer this holiday season, keep in mind that staying within your means is the best gift you can give yourself. Some planning and fiscal foresight will help you stay in charge of your spending, rather than the other way around.

Step one: Establish a total sum for holiday spending

The first step to financial well-being at any time of year is to be aware of how much you have to spend. In consultation with your partner if applicable, establish a total sum you’re comfortable with for holiday spending and pledge to stick to it. You’ll avoid impulse purchases that exceed your means.

Step two: Make a gift list

Gift purchases typically make up the largest portion of holiday spending, so next make a list of all the folks you want to buy for. If you already have particular presents in mind for someone, jot down the approximate cost of each. Or, assign a realistic amount to each intended recipient. Add up the total anticipated amount to be spent on gifts and do a reality check. Resist feeling guilty if you need to trim your list or spend less on someone.

Step three: Anticipate other holiday expenses

Keeping the season bright often involves expenditures outside of gift giving. If your holiday plans include any of these commonly overlooked expenses, now is the time to estimate their costs:

- Travel
- Eating out
- Decorations
- Specialty food items
- Wrapping paper and bows
- Holiday cards and postage
- Entertaining others in your home
- End-of-the-year giving to charities
- Special activities like ice skating or going to a play
Step four: Keep costs down

After adding up your anticipated expenditures, you may decide you need to scale back—and that’s okay. There’s nothing Scrooge-like about buying only what you can afford. Here are some strategies for keeping costs down:

- **Buy used** — Shop yard sales, thrift stores, and Craig’s List. You can often buy new or gently used items for a fraction of the retail cost, while avoiding the traffic at the mall. Younger kids won’t know the difference between a toy still in the box and one that’s been used a few times. And, your partner may be happier with second-hand rather than new when the bills come in. You can also pat yourself on the back for being eco-friendly by skipping the packaging that comes with gifts straight from the store.

- **Draw names or focus on the kids** — If you typically exchange multiple gifts with a large extended family, propose that you draw names instead. Or, exchange gifts for the kids only. If you and a friend both have young children, swap several toys that each of your already own and rewrap for the big day.

- **Regifting** — Did you receive wrong size or duplicate gifts last year that you didn’t have a chance to return? Now is the time to put them to good use. Just be careful not to give them back to the original gift giver.

- **Gift postponing** — Give your partner the gift of anticipatory happiness by making plans to take a trip or attend a performance in the spring. You’ll have something to look forward to throughout the winter months while postponing the associated expenses.

- **Often the most precious gift you can give is that of your time or expertise.** If you’re an ace with a camera, take photos of a friend’s family. If you love animals, offer to pet sit while your cousin is away. Help your parents clean out a closet, do yard work or make some small home repairs. And don’t dismiss the appeal of handmade gifts. Give homemade bread instead of purchasing presents for co-workers, neighbors or your child’s teachers. If you enjoy crafts, go online and you’ll find a multitude of inexpensive ideas.

Step five: Track expenses

You’ve decided how much money to spend on whom and for what. Now you’ll want to track your expenditures. Keep your receipts and subtract each amount spent from your total. If you encounter an unexpected expense, cut back somewhere else instead of raising your overall spending cap.

Pulling it all together: Manage expectations and express gratitude

Appreciating the non-materialistic aspects of the season is key. Demonstrate to your kids that there’s more to the holidays than gift giving by playing together outside or enjoying homemade popcorn while watching a holiday special. Spend time together volunteering as a family at a food bank, soup kitchen or senior center. You’ll realize anew that the most memorable holiday moments don’t involve amassing presents.

You can dial down much of the stress of the season by focusing on what really matters: spending time with the people you love. Take a few minutes each evening to appreciate all that you have. You may find that sticking to your holiday spending plan allows you to slow down and is yet another thing to be grateful for. With planning and some creative thinking, you’ll navigate the holidays with a relaxed outlook and greater peace of mind.
It’s not too late to get a flu vaccine

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people should begin getting vaccinated soon after the flu vaccine becomes available, ideally by October. This helps ensure that as many people as possible are protected before influenza season begins. However, since flu viruses may circulate in the community until spring, it still makes sense to get vaccinated now. After all, who needs two weeks of fever, chills, congestion and muscle aches?

In the 2014–15 season, the flu killed 218 people in North Carolina. Getting vaccinated not only prevents you from developing a life-threatening illness, it can also help protect those around you — including your kids — from contracting the virus. Annual vaccination against the flu is now a condition of employment at Duke University Health System. This policy applies to anyone who provides care, treatment or services in the organization. For more info, visit [http://flu.duke.edu/duhs/index.html](http://flu.duke.edu/duhs/index.html).

The flu vaccine is safe and effective for most people, including those who are pregnant or breast-feeding. The CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone six months and older as the first and most important step in protecting against this serious disease. Vaccination is especially important for people at high-risk for flu complications, such as children younger than two, adults 65 and older, pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions.

Antiviral drugs can be used to treat the flu and prevent complications. The CDC recommends that people at high risk and those who are very sick (such as those hospitalized because of flu) receive antiviral drugs. If a loved one at high risk of flu complications develops flu symptoms, recommend that they receive a medical evaluation for possible treatment with influenza antiviral drugs as soon as possible. At their health care professional’s discretion, people who are not at high risk for serious complications who come down with the flu may also be treated with these drugs, especially if treatment can begin within 48 hours.

In addition to getting a seasonal flu vaccine if you haven’t already, you can take the following actions to prevent the spread of the disease:
- Avoid crowds and people who are obviously sick
- Wash your hands frequently
- Encourage loved ones to get vaccinated
- Stay home if ill to prevent spreading flu to others

Enjoy fresh produce year round with the Mobile Farmers Market

The Mobile Farmers Market is a convenient way for you to get fresh, local produce — and it isn’t limited to vegetables and fruits. The year-round market offers meat, fish, plants and flowers in addition to the seasonal produce items you’d expect. Pre-purchase your orders for pick-up at Duke Gardens or delivery to your home or worksite. With the Mobile Market, you enjoy nutritious, delicious, local foods — while reducing your carbon footprint and helping to support family farms.

Visit [http://www.hr.duke.edu/benefits/wellness/mobilemarket/index.php](http://www.hr.duke.edu/benefits/wellness/mobilemarket/index.php) to get more information and sign up.

Reap the benefits of a nutrition consult

Confused by conflicting media reports about what to eat? Want to learn easy ways to reduce your fat intake or incorporate more vegetables into your diet?

Schedule a free nutrition consult with a registered dietician through LIVE FOR LIFE. All Duke staff and faculty eligible for benefits can schedule two free nutrition consults with LIVE FOR LIFE each calendar year. If you’re covered under Duke Select, there’s even a nutrition consult benefit for dependents. Each Duke health plan offers some level of coverage for a nutritionist visit. Check your plan or call LIVE FOR LIFE at 919-684-3136 for more information.

Consults take place in the LIVE FOR LIFE offices in the lower level of the Duke Clinics Building. They’re also held at Durham Regional Hospital, or they can be conducted by phone.