

Establish healthy traditions to make winter fun, prevent cold-weather blues

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Frigid weather may seem like a good excuse to avoid workouts, stay inside and overindulge in comfort foods. However, health experts from the University of Missouri have found that these tendencies leave most people feeling less content during the winter months. MU researchers say people should establish new traditions to increase happiness and avoid wintertime woes.

Instead of resolving to make drastic new year changes, establish healthy traditions for the winter months, MU nutrition and exercise physiology experts recommend. Incorporate activities and habits that promote health and can be shared with spouses, friends and family members each year. The experts suggest trying a variety of ideas.

- "When thinking about New Year's changes, a good first step is creating a vision for the future by picturing yourself happy and healthy," said Karen Sherbondy, MU Extension special projects coordinator for Family Nutrition Education Programs. "Identify positive and negative aspects of your health and the health of others, including friends, family members, spouses and children. This provides a starting point for establishing new behaviors, avoiding negative habits and seeking help from others."
- "Regarding exercise and physical activity in the winter, some is better than none, more is better than some and too much is difficult to get," said Steve Ball, state [fitness](#) specialist and associate professor in the College of Human Environmental

Sciences. "Establish traditions to accommodate [cold weather](#). Try new things, such as dance classes, swimming or water aerobics, or check out [exercise](#) videos from the library. Invest in home fitness equipment, such as jump ropes, DVDs, treadmills and stationary bikes. Having equipment at home makes it easier to stay physically active. Search for bargains on gently used equipment and try different things to find what works best."

- "Think of things that are enjoyable - spending time with kids, crafts and watching movies – and incorporate physical activity to enhance them," Ball said. "Plan activity breaks, set a timer and have 5-10 minute relays inside or outside, take a walk around the block during commercials or try games that get everyone moving."
- "There are several easy ways to improve mood during the winter," said Alejandra Gudiño, health educator for HES and MU Extension. "Try practicing a few each day, even if they seem silly or unnecessary. They make a difference! Some ideas include: wearing bright colors, reading or watching something funny and laughing out loud – laughing reduces stress hormones and increases endorphins. Socialize and spend time with family, old and new friends and those in need. Creating social ties can boost happiness, improve self-worth and increase sense of purpose."
- "Create fun traditions related to healthy eating," said Ellen Schuster, state specialist for extension. "For example, find healthy recipes online, print a dozen or more and randomly pick one to try each week. Many websites offer reviews and helpful comments. Some websites to try:

Recipe Finder:

recipefinder.nal.usda.gov (for those with limited resources)

Fruits & Veggies...More Matters:

fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

eXtension Families, Food and Fitness recipes:

extension.org/pages/Families_Food_and_Fitness_Dynamic_List_of_Recipes"

- "Set realistic goals with measurable results," Sherbondy said. "Small changes are easier than big changes and can add up over time. Focus on changing one or two behaviors. Once those are mastered, set new goals."

More information: These tips are based on findings from MU research conducted throughout the year.

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