From: Meeks, Sara R.
To: Meeks, Sara R.
Subject: Calm Down for the Holidays Challenge Week 2 Message 2
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OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Live Healthy Live Well

Hello Challenge Friends,

We will end this week on the importance of mental health and reflecting upon what is most meaningful to us. This is especially important during the holiday season when we tend to be pulled in so many different directions. December is just around the corner, so remember to put what you have learned to practice!

Yours in Wellness,

Sara

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Dial Back the Expectations!

Are you planning the perfect holiday for your family? So many of us have this lofty goal but it may be time to rethink what “perfect” is! It seems like the pressure to do more for the holidays starts earlier each year with endless commercials, songs, and advertisements for the special gifts you need to buy to prove how much you love your family and friends. Many people become so stressed and overwhelmed that by the time the holidays arrive, they have shut down.

Stress and depression are unfortunately a part of too many people’s holidays. By following a couple of simple suggestions, you may be able to keep them out of your holiday life.

- Be realistic – as your family situation changes, holiday traditions should also adapt and change.
- Maybe it is time to trim down the holiday gift list. This year a friend and I decide to not share holiday gifts – something we've done for nearly 30 years. We decided that we would get something small for birthdays instead of during the holiday season.
- Be easy on yourself – don't agree to do everything for everyone. Learn to say no!
- Stick to your healthy year-long habits – you can still enjoy holiday parties and food without going overboard. Remember to stay on target and don't neglect sleep!
- Consider giving a gift of time or an experience instead of a traditional present. Would your family enjoy a zoo or museum membership? Is there a day trip you'd enjoy taking with them?

Give yourself permission to prioritize what is really important for you to have your version of a happy holiday! It is not easy to let go of long established holiday habits, but you can decide which ones are most important to you and your family!

Last year, I decided to only bake one kind of cookie – instead of five or six different ones. I let my grandchildren decide what it should be and we spent a wonderful afternoon baking, laughing and taste-testing our creations! I must admit that I was tempted to bake more after they left but resisted. When Christmas arrived, no one even mentioned the other "favorites" that were not on the cookie plate!

This year, why not try cutting back on a couple of holiday traditions and see what happens! I'm guessing that one less wreath, one less present or one less food item at the holiday table will not be missed!

I recently heard a great idea, instead of giving presents, give the gift of your presence!

Reflection - This time of year, many of us get overwhelmed, in part because we are aiming to meet the expectations of others. While it's wonderful to create a happy holiday season for your family, focus on the things that *truly* matter. Are ALL of those decorations bringing joy? If so, wonderful. But give some thought to which of your efforts are most meaningful.

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