

5 Ways to Be Kind to Yourself During the Holidays and Beyond (Hint: They are Easy to Do and Good for You!)

1. BREATHE. Stop what you're doing, close your eyes, and for about one minute, just breathe. Pay attention to the feeling of breathing. You can do this anywhere (except when driving!): home, work, sitting, standing, while waiting in line, before or after driving, while preparing food, when you wake up or just before going to sleep. **Why do this?** Because, for one minute, you are calming both your brain and body and giving your body a chance to "reset" itself. You lessen the stress hormones in your body and you increase the endorphin (feel-good) chemicals in your brain. **How to remember to do this?** Tie a bit of holiday ribbon around your watch or wrist to remind you to take these one-minute breathing breaks at least a half-dozen times or more throughout the day, especially during the hours you feel the most stressed. The feeling of calmness is subtle but you'll notice it more as your daily breathing breaks become part of your normal routine.



2. STRETCH. Easy does it with this one. Simple stretches will do: Gently roll your neck. Stand and lean backwards so you feel the stretch in your back. Do a few arm rolls. Bend forward (gently, gently) and go limp like a rag doll. If you've been sitting for awhile, stand and walk around the room. Wherever you feel tension in your body, take a moment to give that part of your body some attention with gentle stretches or movement. **Why do this?** Your body is a movement-machine; it is made to move and re-energizes itself best through movement. Stretches increase oxygen flow and physical energy. **How to remember to do this?** Another bit of holiday ribbon will do – or a computer reminder, smart phone beep, sticky note – whatever it takes to remind you to take a stretch break every hour or so.

3. EAT. Smaller portions. Again, this one's easy. Eat whatever you want; just cut the portions in half. Tell yourself you can always go back for seconds. Or thirds. And when you eat, eat slowly, pausing between each mouthful. **Why do this?** Because you're giving your stomach time to tell your brain that it's full. It takes about 10 - 15 minutes for the "fullness signal" to reach your brain, so when you eat more slowly, you also eat less. **How to remember to do this?** First, look at your plate and only fill half of it, literally. Second, put down your fork between mouthfuls. You'll automatically eat less and feel better afterwards, with less lethargy and more energy.

4. DRINK. Lots of water. You don't have to count ounces. Nor should you substitute coffee, tea, or sodas for water. Just drink water at regular intervals throughout the day. **Why do this?** Because dehydration can sneak up on you even when you don't feel thirsty. Symptoms of dehydration include sleepiness and a headache. **How to remember to do this?** Carry a water bottle with you and take sips whenever you look at it. Or again, set a smart phone timer to remind you to drink some water.

5. BE MERRY. Or at least, thankful. **Why do this?** Gratitude has a beneficial effect on both the mind and the body. Even being grateful for the small things in your life can increase brain endorphins, which, in turn, helps lessen stress and strengthen the immune system. **How to remember to do this?** Pause, look around you, and mentally say thank-you for the little things you see in that moment that please you or that make your life easier: comfy shoes, sunlight, a warm vehicle, a shady tree, a good book, a child's smile, clouds, music, a moment of silence – well, you get the idea.

**BREATHE, STRETCH, EAT, DRINK, BE MERRY -
AND ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS AND BEYOND!**