



**House Staff Benefits Plan
Voluntary Hospitals House Staff Benefits Plan**

10 Ways to Help Improve Your Mental Health and Well-Being During the Holiday Season

1. Eat a healthy, balanced diet.

Multiple studies have found that eating too much refined sugar or processed food impacts brain functioning and stresses organs like the pancreas. These create negative insulin responses that cause surges in stressor hormones, like cortisol, and increase inflammation. These biological responses can exacerbate anxiety, along with depressed and negative moods. However, good nutrition and only eating when you're hungry can help regulate blood sugar and energy levels, leading to better moods and focus.

2. Get enough sleep.

People struggling with poor mental well-being often battle with sleep, suffering more from insomnia and sleep apnea than those with higher mental wellness. Researchers have found that a good nights sleep – especially deep, REM sleep – is critical for the brain to process emotional information. Not getting enough sleep hinders the brain's ability to merge positive emotional data, which in turn can lead to more negative thinking and behaviors.

3. Exercise regularly.

Exercise is a natural stress reliever. When you are physically active, it changes the body's chemistry in a positive way, boosting dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin levels, which can improve mood and concentration. Exercise also removes tension from the body and helps relax muscles, which can help lead to good sleep.

4. Stop smoking.

People who have poor mental well-being tend to smoke more than those with higher mental well-being. The reason is often physical. People struggling with mental health conditions like depression and anxiety may produce lower dopamine levels, which influence positive feelings in the brain. Nicotine triggers dopamine production, so cigarettes can help provide temporary relief. However, smoking is not only bad for physical health; researchers are finding it can also worsen depression and anxiety.

5. Avoid alcohol.

Many people turn to alcohol to cope with stress, anxiety, and depressed feelings. However, alcohol is a depressant, disrupting the neurotransmitters that impact your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. While a drink may temporarily help a person feel relaxed or less anxious, the effect wears off quickly and can lead to increased negative feelings. Research indicates that people who drink a lot are at risk of having more symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychosis.

6. Stay connected.

There's nothing like having a friend. Strong relationships and positive social connections can help improve both physical and mental health. Feeling connected to others has been shown to reduce anxiety and depression, strengthen the immune system, and reduce inflammation. If you are not in a place where you can build face-to-face relationships, technology can help. Studies have found that online friendships can provide many of the same health benefits as in-person relationships. Another good way to connect is to look for an online community of people who share your unique interests.

7. Get a pet.

Studies show that animals – particularly dogs and cats – can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depressed moods. Even watching a fish tank has been shown to lower blood pressure and improve mental wellness. Pets also provide a sense of purpose and connection which is important for staying positive and can often help individuals get more exercise. Playing with a pet also can raise the brain's feel-good chemicals – like dopamine and oxytocin. But, of course, a pet is a long-term commitment, and you should not get a pet unless you are willing and able to care for the animal properly.

8. Practice stress relievers.

Yoga, journaling, meditation, breathing exercises, etc., are all proven methods for reducing stress, which can help improve your mental state.

9. Balance work and life.

While working long hours is often encouraged by our culture, it is not healthy – physically or mentally. It's important to set

boundaries – like not working past a specific time at night or making sure you take a lunch break – to [help avoid burnout](#). Finding and partaking in hobbies you enjoy and are excited about can make it easier to separate yourself from work. Hobbies can also help you build and maintain connections.

10. Seek professional help if needed.

While the practices listed in this article can help improve mental wellbeing, sometimes they simply aren't enough, or you may need more immediate help. When other methods don't help, consider reaching out to a mental health professional. They can provide the guidance and resources needed to help set you on a more positive.

For more information on benefits available to you please click [here](#) to visit the CIR Benefits webpage.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the Benefits Office at (212) 356-8180 or via email at benefits@cirbenefitfunds.org, Monday – Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm EST.

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