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Health Tip – Destressing During the Holiday Season

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We all know what a busy season the holidays create each year, and it seems we're always running behind and trying to get caught up, rather than staying on top of the seemingly never ending list of to-dos. This can negatively impact our physical and mental health when we become too consumed and overwhelmed by the stressors of the season. Below are three simple ways to take a break and help destress this year while finding some moments of peace in the midst of the hustle and bustle.

1. Body Scan

Relax and close your eyes. Take three deep breaths. From this point on, your breaths will be gentle. Loosen everything – starting at the top of your scalp, wander over your eyes and ears, jaw, shoulders, all the way to your feet. On the way, notice the softness of your belly, relaxing all major muscle groups as you descend to your feet. Notice the contact of your feet on the ground. Once the body is grounded, ease your body and slowly correct your posture. Turn attention to your breath. Track the breath, how it flows in, where it goes. Now as you do another scan, imagine the breath leaving through your skin as you travel from the top of your scalp to your feet.

If your mind wanders, gently come back and think about your breath, one breath at a time. Loosen the shoulders again, allowing them to drop toward the floor. If you lose your scan, pick up where it left off.

When you are ready to finish, allow your attention to widen, open your eyes, and feel your breath exiting from your body into the room.

2. Ocean Meditation

Have you been to the beach and seen the ocean recently? Or maybe you're closer to a peaceful lake, flowing river, or even just a small pond in an area nearby.

You can always access this memory to help you relax. Think about the color of the water, the sound it makes, and all the sensations you might feel as if you were there. Spend a minute on each sense. Can you taste the salt in the air, or feel the cool mist on your face? Can you see the ripples on the surface, or hear the rush of the water?

Just as waves come and go, ebb and flow, so can stressful moments if we take the time to clear our minds, accept what we can change and what we can't, and let go.

3. Breath Counting

Sit in a comfortable position with the spine straight and head inclined slightly forward. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then let the breath come naturally without trying to influence it. Ideally it will be quiet and slow, but depth and rhythm may vary.

To begin the exercise, count "one" to yourself as you exhale. The next time you exhale, count "two," and so on up to "five." Then begin a new cycle, counting "one" on the next exhalation. Never count higher than "five," and

count only when you exhale. You will know your attention has wandered when you find yourself up to eight, 12, or even 19.

Try to do ten minutes of this form of meditation.