

# IT'S YOUR HEALTH WINTER 2017

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## THE ART OF LETTING GO HOW TO EXPERIENCE MORE JOY, LESS STRESS

The holiday season tends to bring on more stress than other times throughout the year. There are gifts to buy, parties to plan or attend, food to cook — all on top of our already busy schedules. We often put so much pressure on ourselves that sometimes we forget how to take a step back, a deep breath and let go.

Integrative medicine specialist Aditi Nerurkar, MD, Medical Director of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center's Cheng-Tsui Integrated Health Center, agrees that stress not only compromises our ability to experience joy, it can take a real toll on our physical and emotional well-being.

"Stress has been associated with overeating and relationship problems," Nerurkar says. "It has also been linked to chronic conditions like heart disease, anxiety and depression, and other physical ailments like migraines and insomnia."

### LETTING GO IS THE WISE WAY

The art of letting go is very much associated with forgiveness and, like forgiveness, it can be a source of peace.

"If you are angry with somebody, thinking and believing that your depression or anxieties are caused by that person, your anger and resentment toward that person doesn't really mean anything," says Tsering Yodsampa, a Tibetan Lama and chaplain at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. "If you let go, you are the one who is getting free from that. Letting go is for your own benefit. It gives you more peace than somebody who is forgiven. It is the highest wisdom."

### HCQU TRAININGS

Our Health Care Quality Unit is always available for trainings for groups large and small. In addition to group trainings, we offer web trainings 24 hours a day/7 days per week. If you are interested in scheduling a training, or have any questions about web trainings, please contact Heather Coleman, M.A., Director, Eastern PA Health Care Quality Unit at 610-435-2700 or [hc@theadvocacyalliance.org](mailto:hc@theadvocacyalliance.org).

For a list of our current web trainings please go to <http://www.easternpa-hcqu.org/Trainings/trainings.htm>.



## GAINING INSIGHT BIT BY BIT

Freeing yourself from attachments and aversions takes time and compassion for others and yourself along the journey. Lama Tsering recommends developing a meditation practice.

"The place to start is an emotional mindset where you truly see the disadvantages and the obstacles that are there, the things that make you feel trapped," he says.

"That seeing is called insight and insight can be only

obtained when you are calm and settled. This contemplation is the practice of meditation."

Even five minutes of daily meditation can help us begin to examine the beliefs we're attached to and start to let go of the ones that are holding us back from happiness.

If meditation doesn't feel like the right fit for you, there are other ways to examine your patterns of interactions with others as well as within yourself.

"When someone finds that they are reacting more strongly to a situation than one would usually presume, it's likely because it is reminiscent on an emotional level of situations that have prompted a similar emotional response," says BIDMC mental health therapist Stephen O'Neill, LICSW, BCD, JD. "It's important to then step back and examine not just the situation at hand but also what associations have been triggered by this. Meditation, as well as psychotherapy, can provide just such a forum for self-reflection and learning to 'let go.'"

Nerurkar, O'Neill and Lama Tsering all agree that in whatever form, engaging in self-reflection is an endeavor well worth the time and effort. And even incremental changes in the way we think and behave can help us feel better.



### What causes the most Holiday stress?



"There is no way you can jump to the roof without even taking the first step on the first floor," says Lama Tsering. "So take things slowly. Gradually, through the practice you can start to loosen the grip of the afflictions that are binding you. I'm not saying surrender. I'm saying develop the ability to accept the flow of life, of course with some determination and willpower to go forward. In this way, letting go will help you become less defensive and experience more joy."



**Check out these websites mentioned in this edition of "It's Your Health"**

<http://www.nepa-hcqu.org/Trainings/trainings.htm>

<http://www.bidmc.org/YourHealth/Health-Notes/HealthyHolidays/TooSickToWork.aspx>

<http://www.bidmc.org/YourHealth/Health-Notes/HealthyHolidays/DryWinterSkin.aspx>



# ARE YOU TOO SICK TO WORK?

**Ah ... ah ... ah ... achoo!** When sniffles and coughing arises, there are two types of people in this world: those who choose to stay home sick, which can result in a short-staffed workplace, and those who “tough it out,” which might cause the spread of germs! So which type are you? The answer could depend on knowing the difference between when it’s okay to go in to work and when you should just stay home.

## MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION BEGINS WITH ASKING YOURSELF SOME SIMPLE QUESTIONS:

### **HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN FEELING SICK?**

You are most contagious in the first 48 hours of a viral illness. Staying home can reduce the risk of spreading your illness, while also giving your immune system a jump start on recovery. So although you might not feel as deeply sick or have as many symptoms at the start of your illness, you could be doing yourself, and those around you, the biggest favor by staying home. For example, the common cold, caused by a virus, typically starts with runny nose and/or sore throat and then a few days later, you develop a cough (although it can all be a part of the same illness).



### **AM I CONTAGIOUS?**

Typically, illnesses are passed through viral particles that we let off when we are sick. If you have a wet cough, a runny nose, fever or aches, you should probably stay at home.

### **DO I HAVE A ...**

**RUNNY NOSE/COUGH?** If it’s just a runny nose without aches or fever, then you may be experiencing allergies. A dry or “clear-your-throat” cough may also be allergies or irritation, rather than a viral infection. In this case, it’s probably okay for you to go to work. But if your runny nose is accompanied by thick, yellow or green mucus, this is an indication that your body is fighting off an illness. Stay home!

**SORE THROAT?** If your throat hurts AND you have aches, including a headache and/or you see white patches on your tonsils, you could have strep throat. Stay home and call your doctor, as you might need an antibiotic.

**FEVER?** Take your temperature. If the thermometer reads over 102°F, that’s a strong indication for infection, and maybe the flu.



So there you have it, some helpful tips for navigating the uniquely American condition of “*presenteeism*” — the practice of coming to work despite illness, injury, anxiety, etc., often resulting in reduced productivity.

sneezes and coughs. It’s more than just good etiquette. It’s good health.

Just remember, for those times when you’re not feeling your best but must go into work for a big meeting or to finish up that annual report, make sure to wash your hands regularly or use hand sanitizer, as well as covering your



## JUST HOW HEALTHY IS CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP?

The curative powers of chicken noodle soup are held in high regard by doctors, nurses and parents alike. Just ask any congested, bedridden friend or family member this holiday season what you can do to help. Between coughs and sneezes you'll hear the one-word answer — *chicken noodle soup* — but what exactly are the health

benefits of this deliciously soothing culinary cure-all? Let's break it down.

### BROTH

When it comes to cold and flu season, fluids are the frontline of defense. Broth is the key ingredient that helps make chicken noodle soup such a powerful weapon. From that first comforting sip, broth hydrates your body and delivers soothing warmth to irritated tissues. "Its salt and electrolytes help with fluid retention, and its warmth and steam reduce inflammation that causes coughing and sore throats," says Julie Robarts, MS, MPH, RD, LDN, a dietitian at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

### SALT AND SEASONING

A raw throat, congestion, and a loss of taste are common symptoms of the equally common cold. That's where chicken noodle soup's salt and seasonings come into play. "When a cold deadens your taste buds, salt is sometimes the only flavor that can break through and encourage you to take in more nourishment," says Robarts. "That's important because salt helps soothe your symptoms by drawing excess fluids away from the irritated tissues in your throat and helping reduce pain." Salt also helps by breaking up mucus and flushing away irritating bacteria. Spices are beneficial for clearing up sinuses. And the dried leaves of oregano and rosemary have helpful antioxidants that help your body fight off whatever is ailing you.

### STEAM

The steam from a hot cup of chicken noodle soup helps thin mucus and increases blood flow, all of which is great for reducing nasal congestion and helping you breathe easier. Steam also has a mild anti-inflammatory effect that can help relax your muscles and soothe the coughs and discomforts of cold and flu symptoms.

### NOODLES

The noodles in chicken noodle soup aren't just for show. They're packed with carbs that help you feel full and satisfied. "Carbs are the preferred source of energy for your body, so getting in a good dose through soup can help you feel less sluggish and run down by your cold or flu," says Robarts.

### VEGGIES

All those bits of carrot, celery, and onion commonly found in chicken noodle soup are a great source of vitamins C and K, as well as other antioxidants and minerals. Not only does this help build a healthy immune system to fight off viruses, it also helps your body recover from illness more quickly. Robarts adds that "Vegetables like carrots are also high in beta-carotene, and can help with symptom relief due to their anti-inflammatory properties."

### CHICKEN

Chicken is full of protein that helps support the immune system. It's also a good source of vitamins and minerals, such as B vitamins, which boost immunity and help regulate digestion. "Chicken is also high in tryptophan, which helps your body produce serotonin that can enhance your mood and give you the feeling of comfort that helps make chicken noodle soup a true comfort food," says Robarts.

**It's important to remember that soup won't cure your cold or flu, and that you should make an appointment to see your doctor if your symptoms don't improve. At the very least, chicken noodle soup is a delicious way to load up on nutrients, increase hydration and get some warmth in your tummy this winter.**



# THE ITCHY TRUTH ABOUT DRY WINTER SKIN

It's a tale as old as winter itself. The days grow shorter, bitter winds descend from the north, and as you wash your hands with greater urgency to keep seasonal germs at bay, your skin cracks, flakes, and fissures like an over-baked holiday cookie. What causes dry winter skin, and what can you do about it? Here are some tips for staying healthy and itch-free through the dry days of winter.

## WHAT IS DRY SKIN?

Dry skin is a common problem that tends to become worse in winter, when environmental humidity is low. It's an ailment that affects people of all ages, regardless of whether there's a history of skin problems.

A typical cause is when there is not enough moisture in the outermost layer of skin. As this layer of skin loses moisture, it shrinks and contracts, resulting in small cracks that expose the underlying layers of skin to environmental irritants. Dermatologists refer to dry skin as "xerosis" or "asteatosis."

## How Do I Know I Have Dry Skin?

Some telltale signs of dry skin are when your hands feel rough or flaky and the normally fine lines of the skin become more visible. You might even see what look like small cuts in your knuckles or knees.

### MORE TIPS:

- ✿ **Add a humidifier to your home.** This circulates moisture through the air that will be absorbed by your skin and hair.
- ✿ **Use an oil-based moisturizer.** Oil-based creams seal moisture into the skin and help preserve natural oils when humidity is low.
- ✿ **Stay hydrated.** Drinking enough water each day helps ensure that your body has enough moisture to keep skin healthy.
- ✿ **Change your cleansing routine.** Use milder, gentler cleansers instead of harsh, soap-based scrubs that are likely to dry out your skin.



It's common for dry skin to occur on the arms, hands, and legs, but it can also affect other areas of the body, resulting in irritation or itching that can interfere with sleep, work, and other regular activities.

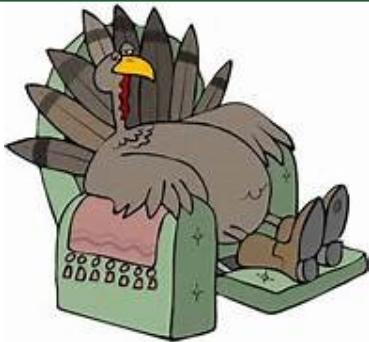
Severe dry skin can sometimes cause painful cracks in the skin, which increases the risk of infection and may be associated with a condition called eczema.

## How Can I Prevent Dry Skin?

It's important to consider your routine to identify what causes your dry skin, then take the proper steps to resolve them. Hot showers are one of the most common culprits, as hot water and soap tend to rob skin of its natural defenses and oils. One helpful tip is to try showering in warm water, not hot, for no more than 10 minutes, and make sure to moisturize within three minutes of gently drying off.

So stay safe, warm, and well-moisturized! Because even though New England winters can be rough, your skin doesn't have to be.

Credit: <http://www.bidmc.org/YourHealth/Health-Notes/HealthyHolidays/DryWinterSkin.aspx>



## TURKEY AND TRYPTOPHAN: WHAT'S THE DEAL?

It's a familiar scene. Gravy-stained plates piled high in the sink, pumpkin pie browning in the oven, trails of cranberry sauce splattered across the floor, and in the next room, serenaded by the sounds of football and an over-indulgent uncle, your family teeters on the brink of sleep.

"What's the deal?" you wonder. "Is all this yawning the effect of tryptophan in turkey?" The claim, though commonly referenced and widely believed, is more fiction than fact.

Yes, turkey is a source of tryptophan — an essential amino acid that's necessary for a healthy diet — but so are many other common foods including chocolate, oats, fish, and peanuts. Additionally, for tryptophan to have any noticeable effect on the brain, it has to be consumed by itself and on an empty stomach. When other amino acids are present, tryptophan has to compete to pass through the formidable blood-brain barrier, something this heavy amino acid is not particularly good at. The exception to this occurs when you eat a small, carbohydrate snack several hours after eating foods high in tryptophan. A slice of pie after turkey would do the trick. In this case, the carbohydrates help clear the path as they carry stored tryptophan through the blood-brain barrier, where it gets converted to serotonin and eventually melatonin, an important chemical in the process of sleep.

While misrepresented as a sleeping potion, tryptophan has many beneficial functions that are necessary for daily health. For example, your body uses it to make niacin, a type of B vitamin that's important for digestion and tryptophan also aids in skin health and nervous system performance. It's also proven to be a key component in regulating one's mood and sense of well-being.

**So while you might feel tired with a tummy full of turkey this holiday season, the real culprit is likely overeating, not tryptophan. Although it might have something to do with that talkative uncle, too.**

## PORTION CONTROL

### How MUCH IS TOO MUCH?



FOOD	SYMBOL	COMPARISON	SERVING SIZE
Milk + Milk Products			
Cheese (string cheese)		Pointer finger	1½ ounces
Milk and yogurt (glass of milk)		One fist	1 cup
Vegetables			
Cooked carrots		One fist	1 cup
Salad (bowl of salad)		Two fists	2 cups
Fruits			
Apple		One fist	1 medium
Canned peaches		One fist	1 cup
Grains, Breads + Cereals			
Dry cereal (bowl of cereal)		One fist	1 cup
Noodles, rice, oatmeal (bowl of noodles)		Handful	½ cup
Slice of whole wheat bread		Flat hand	1 slice
Meat, Beans + Nuts			
Chicken, beef, fish, pork (chicken breast)		Palm	3 ounces
Peanut butter (spoon of peanut butter)		Thumb	1 tablespoon

# TEN TIPS FOR HEALTHY HOLIDAY EATING



1. **BE REALISTIC.** Do not try to lose pounds during the holidays, instead try to maintain your current weight.
2. **PLAN TIME FOR EXERCISE.** Exercise helps relieve holiday stress and prevent weight gain. A moderate and daily increase in exercise can help partially offset increased holiday eating. Try a 10-15 minute brisk walk twice a day.
3. **DON'T SKIP MEALS.** Before leaving for a party, eat a light snack like raw vegetables or a piece of fruit to curb your appetite. You will be less tempted to over-indulge.
4. **SURVEY PARTY BUFFETS BEFORE FILLING YOUR PLATE.**

Choose your favorite foods and skip your least favorite. Include vegetables and fruits to keep your plate balanced.

5. **EAT UNTIL YOU ARE SATISFIED, NOT STUFFED.** Savor your favorite holiday treats while eating small portions. Sit down, get comfortable, and enjoy.
6. **BE CAREFUL WITH BEVERAGES.** Alcohol can lessen inhibitions and induce overeating; non-alcoholic beverages can be full of calories and sugar.
7. **IF YOU OVEREAT AT ONE MEAL GO LIGHT ON THE NEXT.** It takes 500 calories per day (or 3,500 calories per week) above your normal/maintenance consumption to gain one pound. It is impossible to gain weight from one piece of pie!
8. **TAKE THE FOCUS OFF FOOD.** Turn candy and cookie making time into non-edible projects like making wreaths, dough art decorations or a gingerbread house. Plan group activities with family and friends that aren't all about food. Try serving a holiday meal to the community, playing games or going on a walking tour of decorated homes.
9. **BRING YOUR OWN HEALTHY DISH TO A HOLIDAY GATHERING.** That way you know there is at least 1 dish you can eat without feeling guilty.
10. **PRACTICE HEALTHY HOLIDAY COOKING.** Preparing favorite dishes lower in fat and calories will help promote healthy holiday eating.

## INCORPORATE SOME OF THESE SIMPLE COOKING TIPS IN TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY RECIPES TO MAKE THEM HEALTHIER:

**Gravy:** Refrigerate gravy to harden and skim fat off. This will save a whopping 56 gm of fat per cup.

**Dressing:** Use a little less bread and add more onions, garlic, celery, and vegetables. Add fruits such as cranberries or apples. Moisten/flavor with low fat, low sodium chicken or vegetable broth and applesauce.

**Turkey:** Enjoy delicious, roasted turkey breast without the skin and save 11 grams of saturated fat per 3 oz. serving.

**Green Bean Casserole:** Cook fresh green beans with chunks of potatoes instead of cream soup. Top with almonds instead of fried onion rings.

**Mashed Potatoes:** Use skim milk, chicken broth, garlic/garlic powder, and Parmesan cheese instead of whole milk and butter.

**Quick Holiday Nog:** Four bananas, 1 1/2 cups skim or soy milk, 1 1/2 cups plain nonfat yogurt, 1/4 tsp rum extract, and ground nutmeg. Blend/Puree all ingredients, except nutmeg, until smooth. Top with nutmeg.

**Desserts:** Try crustless pumpkin pie. Substitute two egg whites for each whole egg in baked recipes. Replace heavy cream with evaporated skim milk in cheesecakes and cream pies. Top cakes with fresh fruit, fruit sauce, or a sprinkle of powdered sugar instead of fattening frosting.

**Enjoy the holidays, plan a time for activity, incorporate healthy recipes into your holiday meals, and don't restrict yourself from enjoying your favorite holiday foods. In the long run, your mind and body will thank you!**

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## Ideas for Our Newsletter?

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