

Eat Smart, Move More...
Maintain, don't gain!

HOLIDAY Challenge

WEEK 7

Holiday Challenge Guidelines

The overall goal is for participants to *maintain* their current weight for the last 7 weeks of the year. As a participant, you will:

- Weigh yourself each week.
- Track what you eat and drink.
- Track your activity.
- Make a plan.

You made it to the final week!

During these last few days, stay strong and stick to your goals. And of course, don't forget to celebrate all your hard work and progress!



WEEK #7 CHALLENGE:

Focus on Having Fun

Just like eating nutritious foods and engaging in physical activity are good for us, having fun is another way to boost our health. Having fun can make us happier and may help lower feelings of stress. Think about times when you have felt carefree and fully engaged with an activity or group of people. Or think about the last time you had a deep belly laugh and how good you felt afterward. When you focus on fun, you are less attached to the outcome of a situation and are more focused on the present moment. Making time to have fun in our daily lives can have a significant impact on the way we view the world.

This week, be intentional about having fun. Every day, engage in at least one fun activity. It does not have to be complex or elaborate. Maybe you

take a break from work to sing along to your

favorite song or tell jokes with co-workers

before a meeting. Play with your pet,

listen to a new podcast episode, cook

a new recipe, or call a friend and

laugh about a fun memory. The

list could go on and on and may

look different for everyone. Keep it

simple and do something that feels

fun, freeing, and joyful to *you!*



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Daily Tip: Social Connection

Quality social connection can improve our physical and mental health. As humans, we are wired for social relationships, and isolation and loneliness can even have negative health effects (1). Studies have found relationships between social connection and improved health measures, like inflammation, blood pressure, and waist circumference (2). Forming and maintaining social connections may even lower stress and decrease the risk of poor physical and mental health outcomes. Quality social connections, like friends and family, enrich our lives in so many ways. Use these tips to help maintain and improve the quality of your social connections!

- **Self-reflect:** Who makes up your quality social connection network? How do you interact with these connections? Do you want to expand your network or are you happy with its makeup?
- **Take action:** Reach out to your friends and family! Send them a text or give them a call.
- **Schedule time:** Add reminders to reach out and add plans to your calendar. This may help you remember and prioritize your network.
- **Remember events:** Send notes for birthdays, promotions, holidays, or condolences to show you care and maintain the connection.
- **Say yes:** When connections invite you to do something, say yes if you aren't already busy. These are great opportunities to spend quality time with an existing connection or deepen a newer one.
- **Join groups:** If you are looking to build your network, find a group to join and meet people with similar interests. Activities like walking, gardening, book clubs, or classes could lead to new connections.

1. Martino J, Pegg J, Frates EP. The Connection Prescription: Using the Power of Social Interactions and the Deep Desire for Connectedness to Empower Health and Wellness. *Am J Lifestyle Med.* 2015;11(6):466-475. Published 2015 Oct 7. doi:10.1177/1559827615608788

2. Yang YC, Boen C, Gerken K, Li T, Schorpp K, Harris KM. Social relationships and physiological determinants of longevity across the human life span. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A.* 2016;113(3):578-583. doi:10.1073/pnas.1511085112

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Daily Tip: Rethink Takeout

Busy lifestyles compete with time spent in the home kitchen. On a weeknight, ordering takeout can seem like the easiest, most convenient option, especially after a long week of holiday cooking. Eating out provides convenient nourishment as well as opportunities for socializing, celebrating, and experiencing new flavors. There is nothing wrong with eating out because it is one of life's pleasures. However, it is good to make mindful decisions and if you look closely, you can find dishes that aren't full of cheese, red meat, sugar, or half a day's calories. Changing the way we order meals can improve nutritional quality without sacrificing convenience or taste.

- **Stick to one starch.** The default is often double refined carbs like a hamburger and fries. Go with your favorite starch and try to make it a whole grain.
- **Replace red meat.** Get poultry, seafood, or beans. Also, look for the words grilled, steamed, lightly sautéed, baked and roasted on the menu.
- **Load up on vegetables.** Choose vegetable-based side dishes, pile vegetables onto your burrito bowl and don't be afraid to try a vegetarian meal!
- **Mind the sodium.** Nearly all food served in restaurants is too salty. More vegetables can help counter the sodium in other items.
- **Dressing on the side.** Ask for any dressings, oil, butter or sauces on the side so that you can choose how much you add to your dish.
- **Be mindful of portion sizes.** Portion sizes are scaling up. Today's "medium" is often yesterday's "extra-large." Share your meal with a friend or family member. Set aside half of your entree to save for another meal before you begin eating.
- **Make water your beverage of choice.** It is easy to forget about the sneaky calories in sugar-sweetened or alcoholic beverages.



Daily Tip: Reading for Stress Relief

When it comes to stress relief strategies cracking a book open may not seem like an intuitive choice, but research shows that recreational reading even for just six minutes can reduce stress levels by 68 percent. The relaxation effect achieved was greater than listening to music or drinking a cup of tea or coffee. Research has shown that lifelong engagement in intellectually stimulating activities, like reading, can slow declines in memory loss and thinking ability as we age. We know that reading can enhance your vocabulary, but did you know that reading literary fiction can even help elevate your levels of empathy which is a key factor in our development as compassionate human beings (1).

Many downtime pursuits, such as engaging with social media, may agitate individuals. So, don't go thinking that reading the captions on your social media feed counts as stress-relieving reading. In fact, excessive screen time is reported to be associated with a range of negative mental health outcomes, sedentary behavior, and disrupted sleep routines while mindful use of digital devices is linked to well-being (2). Reading is associated with a particular kind of mentally and emotionally engaged relaxation, unlike the passivity associated with other leisure activities, such as watching television.

Bottom line: recreational reading is a simple and cost-effective tool--especially with a **library card**--to help individuals cope with stress.

1. Why it pays to read. <https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2015/why-it-pays-read>.

2. Meyer J, McDowell C, Lansing J, Brower C, Smith L, Tully M, Herring M. Changes in Physical Activity and Sedentary Behavior in Response to COVID-19 and Their Associations with Mental Health in 3052 US Adults. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2020; 17(18):6469. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186469>

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Daily Tip: Celebrate Your Successes

Congratulations—you made it to the end of the Holiday Challenge! Take a moment to reflect on the past 7 weeks. Consider the goals you set at the beginning and the changes you have made to eat smart and move more this holiday season.

As discussed in week 1, it is important to recognize your successes throughout your entire journey. If you met one or more of your goals, make sure to reward yourself! Think about activities you enjoy and engage in those to celebrate your successes! Below are a few ideas to get you started:

- Devote time to a hobby—old or new
- Dance to your favorite music
- Rearrange furniture to refresh a room
- Explore a new walking route, trail, or park
- Call a friend or family member to share your success and catch up
- Host a movie or game night

For more inspiration, print out this [**Non-Food Reward List**](#) to get you started.