Special Feature
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More merry, less stress

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – With all of the holiday season's preparations, socializing and activities, seasonal stress can produce strong emotions. This month, give yourself the gift of being merrier by reducing your stress.

If you find that you are quick to anger, feeling agitated, have tight muscles or rapid breathing, or become overly emotional, you may be feeling stressed out.

To reduce your stress, Dr. Luke Lemke, family practice physician at Columbus Medical Center, said you can choose calming activities such as focused breathing, listening to calming music, getting outside or doing stretches or yoga.

"Take time for quiet time or silence," Lemke said. "It's been proven to be a very important strategy for stress reduction."

Other tips for relieving your stress include:

- Trying stimulating physical activities such as brisk walking, running or dancing.
- Rebooting your nervous system by standing up, walking around or participating in more vigorous exercise.

Tap into your senses

Try these sensory tips to restore calmness, focus and alertness throughout the season.

- **Hearing:** Put on upbeat music and sing along, or even dance. Listen to the sounds of nature outside or on a recording.
- **Sight:** Look at a cherished photo. Take a walk around your yard, a park or other natural space. Can't go anywhere? Close your eyes and picture a place that feels peaceful and rejuvenating.
- **Smell:** Light a scented candle or incense, or use your favorite cologne, perfume or essential oils. Get outside and breathe in clean, fresh air.
- **Touch:** Pet a dog or cat, wrap yourself in a warm blanket, give yourself a massage on your neck or hands, or wear soft, cozy clothing.

Go for balance

According to Lemke, in the mix of the holiday hustle and bustle, it's important to reconnect with yourself."In our fast-paced lives, finding moments of quiet contemplation can be challenging," he said. "Try using some type of mindfulness-based meditation, such as headspace or calm.com, as guided meditation."

Other ways to get back your balance during the holidays include:

- **Treating yourself right.** Eat healthy foods, exercise regularly and do a periodic stress check-in.
- **Giving yourself downtime.** Avoid accepting every invitation and hanging out with people who might make you tense.
- **Avoiding for-sure stress**. Stay away from hot-button topics like religion, politics or other subjects that rev you (or others) up.
- **Reducing your to-do list.** Be realistic and cut out the "shoulds." Instead, focus on the "musts."
- **Not forgetting to play.** Give yourself permission to indulge in the season's joys.

Columbus Community Hospital wishes you all the joys of the season and happiness throughout the coming year.

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Dr. Luke Lemke is a family medicine physician with Columbus Medical Center.