

Winter Wellness

By popular demand from our readers, we have released our **Winter Wellness Planner** for 2018-2019. We know from experience and from many conversations that holidays and the winter season can be challenging. However, we have found through experience that when we plan ahead we can create or reactivate habits and routines to manage stress and create (or re-create) a feeling of wellness. We hope this year's Winter Wellness Planner is useful. Please feel free to share your experience using the Winter Wellness Planner.



You can download your own free copy of the Winter Wellness Planner from www.cspnj.org (double-click on "resources").



Eight Dimensions of Wellness in Winter

Winter can mean many different things to people and may impact all Eight Dimensions of Wellness. For example, occupational wellness can be influenced by time off from work or school obligations. Social wellness may be affected as there are often many gatherings and seasonal events. For some people, the winter leads to lack of socializing and connection.

Holiday meals and seasonal comfort food can shift norms of physical wellness, along with shorter days creating less daylight for outdoor activities. Whether it's through celebration of the winter solstice, Kwanza, Hanukkah, Christmas, or other events, spiritual wellness may be a priority in the winter. It's predicted that shoppers will spend 4.1% more during the winter holidays than spent in 2017,ⁱ which may impact financial wellness for those consumers. Winter can help people thrive across the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, while it may pose challenges for others.

Regardless of whether you find winter to be an uplifting and joyful time of year, or a stressful and depressing one, it is a good time to remind us to focus on wellness across the dimensions.

be good to yourself

Winter Wellness Self-Care

Wellness self-care includes a set of planned and deliberate actions taken that you do daily or weekly. Four key physical wellness self-care strategies include staying active, creating time for relaxation, eating well, and getting adequate amounts of sleep.ⁱⁱ As the days feel shorter with the time change, it is important to follow self-care practices. Wellness self-care is valuable yearlong, though it can be particularly important during holidays and the winter months. Committing to a consistent bedtime routine each night can have significant impact on overall mental and physical health. For someone who only sleeps six and a half hours each night, adding an hour of sleep may decrease activity in genes associated with diabetes, and with processes like inflammation and stress response.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although staying active, eating well, and planning time for relaxation can be difficult with the change in time and colder weather in some areas, there are many activities people of varying ages and abilities can do to enhance these wellness self-care skills.

Continued on next page

Winter self-care (continued from page 1)

Taking a stroll through a winter farmers' market to move your body while purchasing healthy foods can support physical wellness. If there are no farmers' markets in your area, simply heading to the grocery store to pick up seasonal fruits and vegetables – parking far from the entrance or getting off of the bus sooner to add some movement – can support healthy eating and activity.

If you live in a safe community near friends, family, or other supporters, there may be opportunities to connect. Perhaps plan to get together to enjoy a healthy potluck, followed by a walk together. Check out listings for local events you can do with a friend, such as a concert, free movie at the library, or free admission to a museum.

Managing stress and creating time for relaxation are just as important as any commitments you'll make to improving sleep, activity, and eating in the winter. Luckily, keeping physically active, eating well, and getting enough sleep are all important factors for stress relief,^{iv} so managing stress doesn't have to feel like another item on your to-do list.

For some, winter can bring with it stress, anxiety, depression, and even social isolation. It's important to take time for self-care and relaxation to improve mood and quality of life.

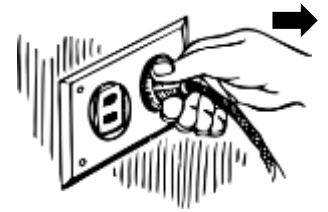
Relaxation practices will look different for everyone. It's important to know your own limits and what is best for you. Relaxation may include things like repeating wellness affirmations, phrases such as "I am grounded, steady, and calm" or "I am grateful for all the gifts of my life." Meditation can be a strategy for relaxing, as well as practicing mindfulness or practicing deep breathing.^v



Trying something new, like using mindfulness coloring books (see page 4 for a sample) or mobile apps, can be a great way to spend quality time alone and relax.

Wellness self-care can also include making a conscious deliberate effort to unplug from social media.

This may be difficult for many, but we suggest you challenge yourself and others to plan time to unplug at various intervals during the holiday and winter season.

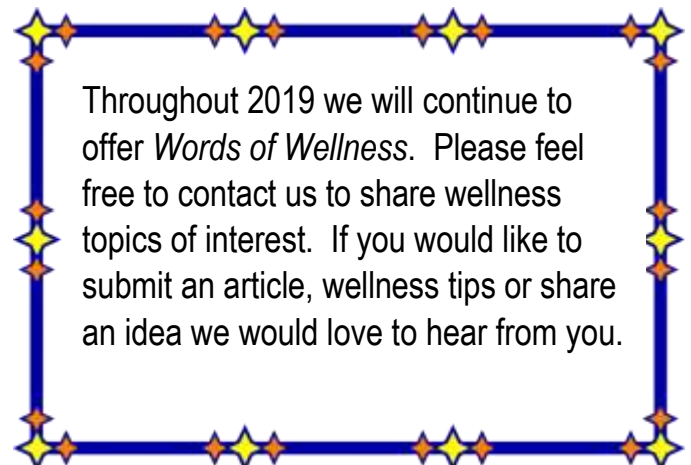


For those who do celebrate winter holidays, it's important to be mindful that not everyone recognizes these occasions. Don't assume everyone shares your holidays and traditions. Be sure to avoid any pressure for others to engage. If you or others do not recognize differences in traditions, that could create a sense of social isolation. It is also important to reach out to others who may not celebrate these holidays to be a support.

Learning about what other people do to stay well during the winter and about ways they have celebrated family and community traditions can be intellectually stimulating. You can discover similarities and differences and maybe even expand your own repertoire of activities and events.

The Winter Wellness Planner, mentioned on page 1 and described on page 3, may be useful to help you reflect on enjoyable and relaxing activities to do alone in order to feel good about any time spent in solitude, and to be alone without feeling lonely.

Regardless of whether winter is your favorite season, or a time of year you can live without, focusing on wellness self-care is important and can help you yearlong.



Wellness Planner 2018-2019

This year's **Winter Wellness Planner** can help you plan self-care activities from December 2018 through January, February, and March 2019. This year we have added some new features, including a Wellness Affirmation developed by Dr. Susan Gould Fogerite and Dr. Peggy Swarbrick. This affirmation was developed for a wellness self-care program for caregivers. We encourage you to create your own self-care affirmation.

We are approaching a season of many holidays and celebrations: **the winter solstice, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanza, St Lucia Day, and Twelfth Night (Three King's Day). New Year's Day** (January 1) and the **Lunar New Year** (February 5, 2019) are times for new beginnings. Many other special days occur during December, January, February, and March.

A **Holiday** is a day set aside by custom or by law on which normal activities are set aside and businesses often are closed. By definition, holidays should focus on leisure and getting together with loved ones. However, even the happiest of holidays can be a source of stress. The holidays can be overwhelming as well as rewarding. For people who have experienced losses or who feel alone, holiday times can be especially difficult.

Holidays can also be good: spending time with family, sharing memories, and just being around people you care about. This season can be a reminder to give others the gifts of time. Spending quality time, even if for a short periods, can really uplift our spirits or help you uplift others spirits, especially people who may be experiencing difficulties. Volunteering and being a friendly visitor to people who are alone are wonderful ways to give.

We are fast approaching changes in weather that often can lead to isolation and depression. Early snow in 2018 in some areas of the country has already created challenges. Even in areas without snowy weather, seasonal changes such as seeing trees without the leaves can be unsightly and depressing. Cold and wet weather may keep us indoors more than we might like.

People may think a lot about death during this time. This is natural, given the shortening of the days, the death of warm weather plants, and wildlife who retreat or migrate for the winter months.

Try and plan ahead. Find some activities that you would like to do and schedule them into your winter calendar.

Using the **Winter Wellness Planner** 2018-2019 can be a great planning tool to help you truly enjoy the holiday season and get through the winter.

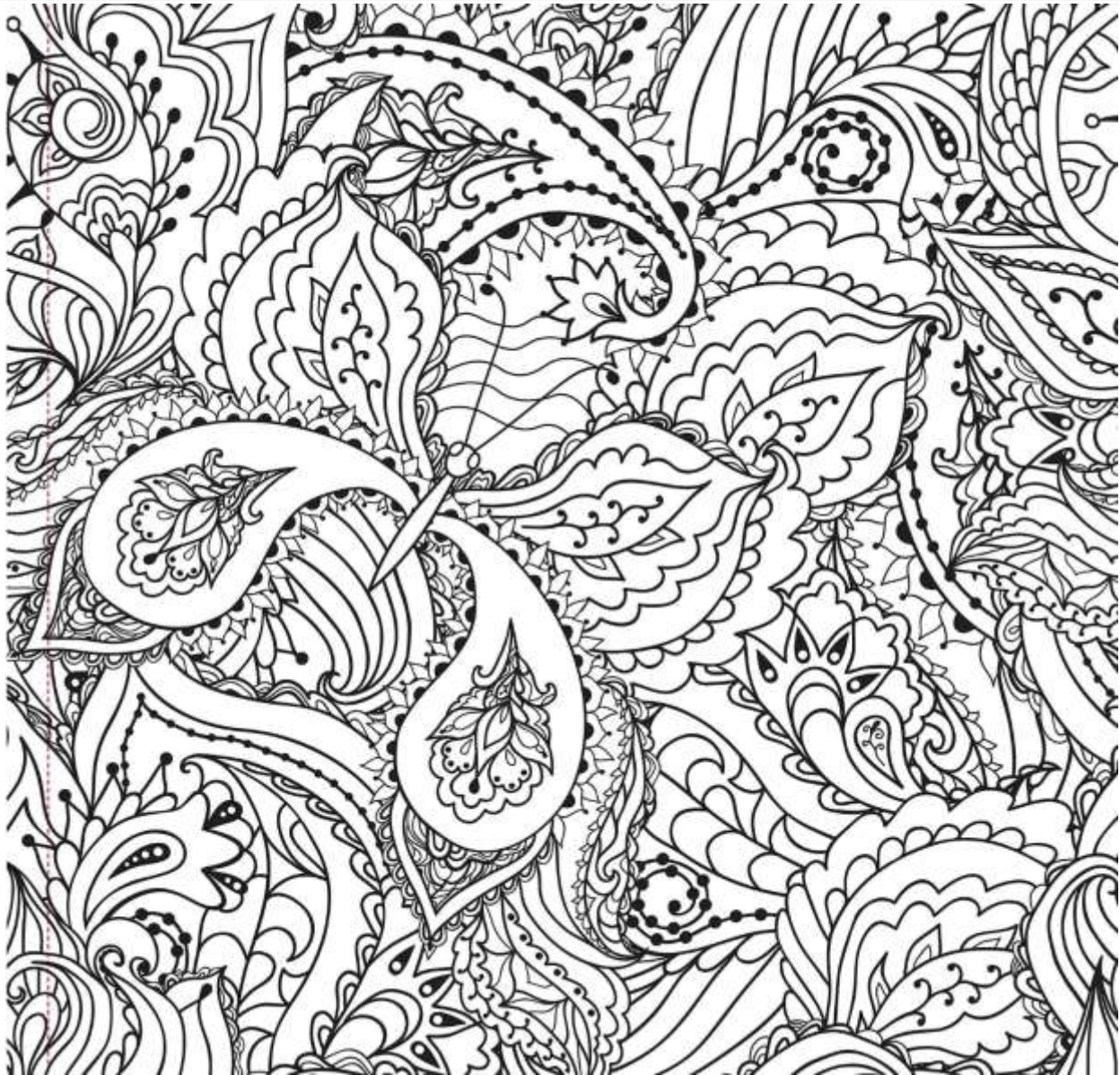
How to Use the Winter Wellness Planner

There are many ways to use this resource.

- Alone – You can work on it by yourself. Take time to complete the Planner instead of rushing through it. Reflect on each section or activity. If you keep a journal, you may want to reflect on the Planner in your journal.
- Pairs – Work with a friend, professional, or supporter. You can work together with another person in a peer support context or can use your supporter as a sounding board for the thoughts and feelings that come up as you complete the Planner.
- Group – Offer a group on Winter Wellness for the people you support. Discuss the content and activities in the Planner. Group members may choose to meet up outside the group session to share some winter activities with one another.
- Workshop – Plan and offer a half-day workshop. We have done this many times and people love a 3- or 4-hour workshop format. Be sure to circulate information about your workshop far enough ahead so that people will be able to build it into their schedules.
- Share your experiences and/or distribute the Planner in various meetings, such as self-help groups, staff meetings, or community groups.

We Welcome Your Input!

Please share how you have used the planner and describe ways that it has been helpful for you personally and/or with people you support. If you are willing to have us include your ideas and experiences in a future issue, let us know and include your contact information for our records.



References and Resources



Thanks to Dr. Crystal L. Brandow, with Policy Research Associates, Inc., for her contributions to the Eight Dimensions of Wellness in Winter article. Illustrations are listed online as free for reuse without attribution, and are from various sources, including flickr.com, Microsoft Word® icons, openclipart.org, and pixabay.com.

ⁱ National Retail Federation. (2018 October 24). Consumers will spend 4.1 percent more than last year during winter holidays. Retrieved from <https://www.nrf.com/media-center/press-releases/consumers-will-spend-41-percent-more-last-year-during-winter-holidays>

ⁱⁱ Swarbrick, M. & Nemece, P. (2018). *Winter wellness planner 2018-2019*. Freehold, NJ: Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey, Inc.

ⁱⁱⁱ BBC News. (2013 October 9). How much can an extra hour's sleep change you? Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24444634>

^{iv} National Institutes of Health. (2014 December). Feeling stressed? Stress relief might help your health. Retrieved from <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2014/12/feeling-stressed>

^v Health Direct. (2017). Relaxation and mental health. Retrieved from <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/relaxation>

