



RELAX AND BREATHE EASIER THIS HOLIDAY:

Stress-Free Alternatives to Smoking

As the anticipation of winter sets in and families gear up for holiday celebrations, the juxtaposition of joy and stress becomes more pronounced. According to a new poll from the American Psychiatric Association (APA), 31% of Americans anticipate being more stressed this holiday season than last year, representing a 9% increase since 2021.

During high-stress moments, many people turn to familiar comforts like smoking. This year, allow the festive spirit to be a catalyst for positive change, encouraging you to prioritize well-being instead of reaching for that cigarette, vape pen, cigar, or hookah. This holiday season let's create memories filled with joy, connection and health. By choosing healthier alternatives, you are gifting yourself and your loved ones a brighter, smoke-free future. Breathe easy knowing your choices are cherishing the moment and the years to come.

Healthy Distractions for Stressful Moments

Effective techniques can help calm your mind, or keeping your hands busy can be a great way to divert attention away from smoking. Take these practices on the road or use at home:

- Deep breathing exercises – when cravings strike, pause, and engage in slow, deep breaths
- Engaging hobbies – distract yourself with activities like knitting, drawing, or journaling
- Physical movement – take even a brief walk around the block or do few minutes of stretching

Plan Ahead for Tempting Situations

To get to a place where these practices and distractions work effectively, preparation and communication are required on your part. The best thing you can do for yourself is to anticipate holiday stressors and challenges in advance. Starting today, develop a plan that will uniquely work to support your triggers and vulnerabilities. Consider engaging in role playing with a friend, strategizing ways to handle social situations where others might be smoking. Having a proactive approach not only empowers you to face the season with confidence but also strengthens your resolve to maintain a smoke-free lifestyle amidst the holiday festivities. So, while hanging your decor, include these smoking cessation tips in your holiday prep:

- **Inform your circle** – let your friends and family know about your commitment to a smoke-free holiday as their support can be invaluable in moments of weakness

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- **Create a smoke-free environment** – if hosting, make your gatherings smoke-free which will support your goal and create a healthier environment for all attendees
- **Phone a friend** – groups like the American Lung Association often provide resources and communities for individuals seeking to quit, for example tobacco quitlines, especially during high-stress seasons

Savory Delights Without the Smoke

A hallmark of the holiday season is the delightful array of foods and beverages that adorn our tables and connection with loved ones. How can that also be a celebration of a healthy, sustainable lifestyle?



Crunchy Snacks: Stock up on healthy, crunchy alternatives like carrots, celery and nuts. They both satisfy cravings and provide nutritional benefits!

Herbal Teas: Warm beverages offer comfort. Choose non-caffeinated herbal teas like chamomile or peppermint, which can soothe nerves and reduce cravings.

Infused Waters: Cucumber-mint, strawberry-basil and lemon-rosemary are refreshing combinations that can quench your thirst without the need for sugary or caffeinated beverages, which might trigger the urge to smoke.



Warm Spiced Ciders: Embrace the holiday spirit with non-alcoholic spiced ciders. Simmer apple or pear cider with a mix of spices like cinnamon, cloves, and star anise for a cozy drink that fills the room with festive aromas.

Healthy Dips and Spreads: Prepare homemade dips like hummus, guacamole and tzatziki. These offer a burst of flavor. And the snacking helps distract from the hand-to-mouth action associated with smoking. Remember to be sensible with your snacking, being mindful of not over-indulging.



Champion Cessation in Community

Remember, when you quit smoking, you are not losing anything. - Rather, you are gaining healthier practices that benefit everyone in your household, neighborhood and the environment at-large. Engaging in activities you cherish, outside of your work environment, can be a tremendous source of rejuvenation. This might mean immersing yourself in a hobby, finding solace in meditation or simply relishing a quiet stroll.

As holiday pressures intensify during your smoke-free journey, take comfort knowing that you're not alone. Your **Cook County/ComPsych Guidance Resources Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** offers invaluable resources specifically tailored for smoking cessation, providing guidance, counseling and strategies to navigate the road to being smoke-free. Utilize the EAP to connect with professionals who can offer techniques to help you manage stress and anxiety and provide critical support during your new smoke-free lifestyle.

Wishing you and yours a Happy Holiday Season!

