



De-stress With More Rest in December

The latest health and wellness news, tips, and updates from the Lay Benefits Department of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston.



Get a Good Night's Sleep

The weather is getting colder and the days are shorter again, so let's break out the cozy blankets and hot cocoa to help set up a better sleep-inducing environment for ourselves this winter!

In the most recent [2022 Sleep in America poll](#), the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) found "appropriate light exposure, including bright light during the day and dim light at night, helps regulate the circadian rhythm, the natural sleep/wake process behind healthy sleep. However, nearly half of Americans say they're not exposed to bright light indoors in the morning and afternoon and most indulge in screen time too close to bedtime". Our daily meals also play an important role in circadian rhythm and regulate our sleep/wake cycles, but 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. don't have regular mealtimes, affecting the quality of sleep. The CDC has [found](#) that the role of sleep is crucial in lowering our risk and the management of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Sleep can help encourage innate and adaptive immunity. Innate immunity is the body's first line of defense that helps to keep harmful materials from entering our bodies. Adaptive immunity builds over time through exposure and the production of antibodies. These immunities work together to help increase our body's inflammatory response, which helps fight infection and even improves the effectiveness of vaccines.

With 7-9 hours of sleep as the recommended average, what can we do to improve our sleep each night? Purchase blackout curtains to limit the amount of light coming into the room, ensure proper neck support from pillows, find a comfortable room temperature, and try spritzing a relaxing scent like lavender in the room to help ease you to sleep. Avoid bright screens two to three hours before bedtime, consider wearing blue light glasses when looking at screens for long periods of time, and try out the Night or Dark Mode on your mobile device! While it can be hard to fit in physical activity when we're tired or exhausted, physical activity helps us fall asleep and stay asleep, decreasing insomnia while also improving overall health. Try out some gentle stretching videos on YouTube or hit the treadmill at a time that best fits your schedule. Sleep is important to proper physical, mental, and emotional health, so make sure to get your "ZZZ's" in!

LOOKING AHEAD...

Mental Health Focus: Stress During the Holidays

Minimize your stress and maximize time with family with these stress-reducing tips.

Advent Reflection

Wellness Webinars

This month we focus on resisting the pressure to be perfect, improving relationships, holiday dining, and best sleep practices.

Hand Hygiene

Keep germs away this Winter season with proper hand-washing technique!

Wellness Corner

Let's make some Homemade Chocolate Bark this holiday season! Brought to you by our friends at Omada.

Mental Health Focus: Stress During the Holidays

During the holidays, sometimes we become overwhelmed with stress. How can you [minimize](#) stress so you can be more present and enjoy time with family and friends?

Limit financial stress. The holiday season can drain your energy, time, and bank account, especially with 2022 being a tight financial year for many of us. You may feel the urge to purchase bigger, more expensive gifts for your loved ones, but big-ticket purchases may create more stress on your wallet. Set a budget or consider a gift swap or Secret Santa with a group instead of buying for every extended family member. You can also get creative and gift them a DIY project you made with love or plan to gift them an experience in the next few months when you may have more disposable income.

Make “You Time” a priority. You can be so swept up in seeing friends and family, hitting the mall, running errands, attending parties, and decorating that you forget to take time to relax. Schedule time for yourself and stick to that schedule. Get your nails done. Go to a coffee shop and read a new book. Bundle up and go for a walk. Set up your painting station and get to work after the kids go to bed. Set aside time to do things that make you happy and reduce your stress!

Learn to say “NO”. While this can be easier said than done, saying “yes” to helping with various tasks when you feel like you’re already running out of time can lead you to spreading yourself too thin and getting burnt out. Learning to say “no” when you’re feeling overwhelmed or stressed can take a task off your plate, giving you more time to check off other priorities on the list. Family and friends will understand if there are things you can’t take on.

Get Realistic. Give yourself some grace and set a healthy expectation that some things may not go as planned and that’s okay! Someone may be sick and can’t attend a get-together, guests may show up late to dinner, and the Christmas ham might be a little overdone. Try to go with the flow and set the bar of expectations lower, expecting that something may go awry.

Get help if you need it. Resources are available to help you process acute and chronic stress. You can seek treatment with a therapist or behavioral care specialist who can help you start CBT (cognitive behavior therapy), offer coping strategies, and prescribe medications if needed. Through the Archdiocese of Boston Health Plans, you have access to behavioral telehealth visits through Well Connection. Please click this [link](#) to visit the Well Connection information page, available through your [MyBlue](#) account.



Advent Reflection

As we prepare for the coming of Christ over the next four weeks, let us celebrate the gifts He has blessed us with in our lives while also practicing patience as we wait for the gifts He has yet to put before us. Sometimes we can be so busy or focused that we can forget we have beautiful moments and relationships around us. Let us continue to grow, hope, and love in the name of God, and lastly, let us go into the new year with renewed gratitude and appreciation for all He has given us.



MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

FROM THE RCAB BENEFITS DEPARTMENT



Wellness Webinars

Employees and spouses enrolled in one of the RCAB Health Plans and registered in the Blue Cross *ahealthyme* program can earn \$25 into their HealthEquity HRA or HSA accounts for attending a wellness webinar. Points are awarded for a maximum of **six** wellness webinars/family activities per Plan Year.

Resisting the Pressure to Be Perfect - Learn to Live

Use the access code RCAB to access webinar AVAILABLE ANYTIME

Report your attendance to benefits@rcab.org.

Dr. Russ and the Clinical team explain perfectionism, what the pressure does to us, ways to think differently about high standards, and how to face fears of imperfection.

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

Building Stronger Connections for a Healthier Life - Learn to Live

Wednesday, December 7th @ 12pm

Use the access code RCAB when registering Report your attendance to benefits@rcab.org.

Research shows that connectedness is a key factor for health, but our connections with others are slipping and many of us feel lonelier than ever. Wouldn't NOW be a great time to increase your immunity, improve your mood, and extend your life? Join us as we explore your own factors for connectedness, identify practical ways to become more connected, and discuss ways to remove the barriers that keep you isolated.

[Click Here to Register](#)

Dining Solutions for a Healthy Holiday

Wednesday, December 7th @ 6pm

Participants learn how to slash fat and calories from holiday mealtime favorites, dine out healthfully, and balance holiday stress with exercise and seasonal super foods.

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

Beyond Sleep Hygiene: Best Sleep Practices

Tuesday, December 13th @ 6:30pm

What is Sleep Hygiene anyway? We know what to do to regulate our bed and wake times, but can we just jump into bed and fall asleep after seeing that exciting new movie or responding to an emotionally charged email? No, and what explains why are the practices of sleep hygiene. This webinar discusses best practices to improve your sleep.

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)



In Case You Missed It...

You can still view the recorded webinars from last month below. **After viewing these webinars, please self-report your viewing to benefits@rcab.org** and you can earn 25 HRA/HSA dollars. Points are awarded for a maximum of six wellness webinars/family activities per Plan Year. **You can access webinars for 60 days following their live recording date.**

Habits: Building the Good, Breaking the Bad - Learn to Live

[Click Here to Access Video](#)

Inflammation Busters: The Key to Disease Prevention

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

Mindful Eating: Vitamin M!

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)



*Let us know what you want to see!
Please email Kara Lavertu at klavertu@rcab.org with your webinar topic ideas or requests.*



Hand Hygiene

With cold and flu season here and COVID-19 still a significant ongoing concern, let's discuss important times to wash your hands, how to use hand sanitizer correctly, and some surprising facts about where dangerous germs can be found.

Per the [CDC](#), it is important to wash our hands often, especially before and/or after some high-risk activities for germ spreading. These include after going to the bathroom, touching an animal or handling their food, after touching trash, and before/during/after food prep.



How do we wash our hands correctly to reduce the spread of germs in our home, cars, workspace, and community?

- 1) Wet your hands first with clean, running water, turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- 2) Lather up your hands with the soap between your fingers, under your nails, and on the back of your hand.
- 3) Do this for 20 seconds.
- 4) Rinse off the soap under clean running water.
- 5) Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them*.

**[Hot-air dryers](#) found in many public bathrooms can disperse more germs and viruses from the bathroom back on to your hands, so a clean towel or air drying is best!*

Don't have a sink nearby? Hand sanitizer can do the trick until you can find one!

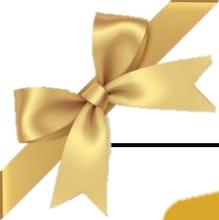
While it may not kill all germs that hand washing can or remove dirt, grime, or harmful chemicals you may have touched, it can quickly kill many germs living on your hands and reduce the spread to things you may touch later. How do you properly use hand sanitizer?

- 1) Use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- 2) Apply the sanitizer to the palm of your hand based on the amount recommended on the label.
- 3) Rub your hands together to spread the gel over your palms, fingers, and back of hands.
- 4) Rub in the sanitizer **until dry**.

Protect Against Germs At Home

The Washington Post [reported](#) on some of the dirtiest places in our homes. What can you do to minimize the spread of germs?

- Close the toilet lid before flushing - Fecal particles can become airborne, landing on any surfaces within your bathroom, including toothbrushes, retainers, and sink handles.
- The average sponge in our homes supports the growth of both yeast and mold, as well as E.coli and salmonella. To kill bacteria, you can run the sponge through the dishwasher.
- Clean your coffee maker's water reservoir! It can host mold and yeast, so make sure to follow manufacturer instructions for cleaning the appliance to ensure your cup of morning Joe is nothing but coffee.
- Pet bowls [rank](#) #4 for the most germ-infected place in a house. Make sure to safely clean pet bowls and eating areas to limit the spread of germs. Speaking of our fur friends, pet toys can carry staph, yeast, and mold so remember to throw them in the washing machine to sanitize them!
- Fecal matter, yeast, and mold can be found on cell phones, keys, wallets, and even the bottom of handbags. Wipe down your commonly used items to prevent the spread of harmful bacteria.



THE
WELLNESS
CORNER

Treat yourself without breaking the scale



No matter what the scale says, there's a place for treats this holiday season. Try this festive recipe, which is pleasantly sweet but not overloaded with sugar.



Homemade Chocolate Bark:

- **1 pound** (454g) dark chocolate, 70% cacao or higher
(chocolate chips work great)
- **¾ cup** nuts of choice, chopped
(suggested: walnuts, pecans, almonds, pistachios, or hazelnuts)
- **¼ cup** dried fruit of choice, chopped
(suggested: cherries, cranberries, apricots, or raspberries)



Directions:

1. Line a baking pan with parchment paper.
2. In a double boiler, melt chocolate over low heat until smooth.
3. Remove from heat and use a rubber spatula to evenly spread chocolate over parchment-lined pan.
4. Immediately sprinkle chocolate with nuts and chopped dried fruit.
5. Let cool slightly, then freeze for about 2 hours or until solid.
Once frozen, remove from the freezer and break into pieces (roughly 25).

A taste of things to come...

Omada® helps you lose weight, gain energy, and improve your overall health, all with a simple app. We'll match you with a health coach you can message anytime, anywhere—and you'll never pay a dime.

See if you're eligible for Omada in just 1 minute:

omadahealth.com/rcab



In good health,
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston Benefits Department

 **ahealthyme**® Everything to live a healthier life