



Finding Balance in the Holiday Rush

There is a deep stillness in the lengthening darkness of winter. Our own natural rhythm points us towards quiet and rest. And yet here we are, gearing up for the holiday season of parties, food and gifts. I always feel pulled in two directions. How do we find our balance this time of year?

It helps to slow down, even just a little. When we pause, and return to our breath, we come back to ourselves and back to the moment. It doesn't take much. When you pause, you can consider your choices. Instead of wanting to have it all (or buy it all), you can consciously choose. What matters? What brings value to your life and to those you love?

When you pause, it is easier to fully enjoy the season. You can truly connect with people, savor the smells and textures; the tapestries of color and light. From the place of balance and attention, you can indulge in the varied tastes with all your senses and still stop when you are satiated. Balance can usually be found now, in this moment. Where are you?

Sleep May Be More Important Than You Think!

The long, dark, nights are a compelling invitation to sleep. But many of us stay up late this time of year, either in revelry or catching up with the extra needs of the season. It can seem like there just isn't time for sleep—but think again. Sleep may be more important than you realize.

Grehlin and leptin, two of the hormones that control appetite, are produced in the deepest stages of sleep. Less sleep means *more* grehlin (which stimulates the brain to keep eating) and *less* leptin (which signals the brain to stop eating). A nightly total of 7-9 hours of sleep is ideal. Research shows that people who sleep 5 hours were 50% more likely to weigh more, and people who sleep 4 hours or less are 73% more likely.

The brain interprets a drop in leptin as a sign of starvation and responds by boosting hunger and burning fewer calories. Sleep deprivation also impacts insulin resistance, blood sugar levels, and immunity (the last thing you need during the winter cold and flu season.)

So what can you do? Take an honest look at your priorities. Sleep is important. What can be let go of? What can be put off until another day? Other things you can do to promote a good night's sleep: avoid caffeine, sugar, alcohol and stimulating activities in the evening. An hour before bed, limit TV and computer. It can help to have a bedtime routine or ritual that is soothing and mentally prepares you for sleep. Seek treatment if you have sleep apnea. Sweet dreams!



Letting Go (and Holding On)

Letting go is hard for me. A good example is this column, which I have struggled with but won't let go of. *Letting go* covers broad territory. It shows up often and in diverse ways.

A poignant example in my own life is my decision to leave my part-time job as dietitian for Healdsburg Hospital. I have loved working there (with great people who do really good work) and yet my heart is with my growing business. Every change contains both loss and gain. Even when it's our choice, and for good reasons, there is a bittersweet quality. I move forward into something that is exciting for me. But I have to let go of people I care about, projects I've been involved with, and 30 years of working in a hospital.

A different form of *letting go* shows up this time of year in our expectations. We have mental pictures of what we think the holidays should look like. We can feel depressed or let down when it doesn't happen that way; or overwhelmed in trying to live up to it. *If* we can let go of our expectations, we can enjoy what is actually there.

Expectations can impact exercise. Some of my clients remember work-out routines from years past (before children, when they were younger) and (initially) think that doing anything less is not worth doing. It is tempting to hold on to the way it used to be, rather than starting from where we are now.

We can feel stuck in old negative beliefs that we *want* to let go of, like thinking that we aren't good enough, what we do isn't enough, or 'why bother, it will never work'. Other beliefs include 'clean your plate', and 'saying No will hurt their feelings'. Even when we want to, it can be hard to let go.

How *do* you let go? Sometimes it means moving on, listening to your inner voice, and staying the course. It often requires faith - you made the decision for good reasons and need to trust that even during the times when you can't remember why. Mostly it just requires awareness.

Even though we talk about 'letting go', it is really about what we hold on *to*. Increase your awareness of what you hold on to. Is it true? What else could be true? As this year draws to a close, it is good to reflect on what are the ideas and beliefs that you no longer need, and that can be released now.

Wishing you lightness and peace this holiday season!

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