Inside this issue...

- Holiday health
- Book club selection
- Reframing
- Preventing weight gain
- Tax receipts
- Family activities
- Sweet potato recipe
Holiday health

The month of December is joyous when full of family, friends and celebrations. But it also brings many seasonal challenges, stress and increased workloads. Keep your well-being in check this holiday season and practice self-care to prevent burnout.

Career

• Look forward to the work day. Celebrate the holiday season with activities like games, healthy treat exchange or a meal with co-workers.

Community

• Pledge to give back. Connect to your community by volunteering your time and talents, or donating food, clothing or money to local organizations. Devote at least two hours this month to doing something that benefits others.

Social

• Develop 3-4 close relationships that bring joy and foster health in your life. Spend time with family and friends during the holidays and express to those close to you how each of them contributes to your well-being.

Financial

• Buy experiences instead of focusing on material goods. When gift giving, focus on the experience the receiver will gain from your gift. Free or inexpensive experiences like sledding, a holiday lights tour, movie passes or a membership to a museum will mean a lot more than another thing to put on the shelf.

Physical

• Start with sleep. Feeling rested greatly impacts the decisions you make throughout the day. Give yourself the gift of energy this month by resting 7-9 hours each night, instead of sacrificing sleep to get one more thing done.

Emotional

• Maintain a healthy perspective. When emotions are elevated, schedule time to practice your favorite stress coping strategies. Read a book, exercise, listen to music, breathe deeply or sit in a quiet place to calm your emotions.

Book Club

The Opa! Way: Finding Joy & Meaning in Everyday Life & Work

by Alex Pattakos and Elaine Dundon

Life is not about the pursuit of happiness, but the pursuit of meaning. Using inspiration from the wisdom of ancient Greek philosophy and traditional values, The Opa! Way provides a breakthrough approach and tools to renew your outlook on life.

OPA is more than just a word, it also frames the three lessons of the book which are Others, Purpose and Attitude. Stories of the Greek culture are intertwined with tools to connect with your community, engage with yourself to develop a deeper purpose and embrace well-being. When you develop your own core of meaning you can become more engaged at work, resilient, energetic, healthy, creative and productive.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you rate your current well-being, on a scale of 1-10?
2. What was your favorite story from the book?
3. What chapter did you find inspiring?
4. How do you plan to use the lessons from the book in your life?
Give it a try...

**Prevent holiday weight gain**

Maintaining weight over the holidays is a topic that comes up every year. This holiday season, commit to your health to start the new year feeling empowered.

**A few tips to keep in mind:**

- Take charge of your choices. Offer to bring a healthy side dish or appetizer, such as a fruit or veggie tray to guarantee a healthy choice is available.

- Watch out for empty calories. Alcohol, soda, punch, cider and hot chocolate all contain calories and add up fast. Water is always the #1 choice.

- Prevent grazing. While baking, cooking or before a meal, chew on a piece of gum to avoid taste testing and over eating. Those small bites can add up to a lot of extra calories!

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**Positive reframing**

Is your glass half empty or half full? This metaphor simplifies the idea of reframing—how you experience your world and daily situations. Difficult events and people are a part of everyday life. How you frame these situations can leave you angry or drained, but with some positive reframing you can feel optimistic, or be at peace with the situation.

Take a moment to think about a recent situation that left you feeling negative. Go through the entire event from beginning to end in your mind and write down the emotions you felt afterward.

What beliefs led you to feel the way you felt during and after the event? Now that you understand how your mindset led to your emotional reaction, how can you change your response to the event or reframe it in a positive way?

Positive reframing does not change your daily situations, but can help reduce the damage you feel and put things into a healthier perspective. Challenge your initial reactions and assumptions about events and focus on what you learned instead. Each day, choose a situation after the fact to explore and reframe. After some practice, you can retrain your brain to start to automatically frame situations in a more positive way.

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**Tax receipts**

Make the most of your tax refund by having important documents and receipts available from 2017 expenditures. Some of our everyday expenses can help to lower your taxable income, ultimately increasing your tax refund.

**Childcare**

You may be able to receive a credit for your babysitter, day camp, after school program or daycare expenses. To qualify, all of the adults filing on the tax return must have earned income, unless one is disabled dependent or a full time student.

**Charitable donations**

Every time you make a donation of money or clothes, ask for a tax deductible receipt. Make sure it includes the monetary amount or estimated fair market value of your donation.

**Homeowner expenses**

Large costs can be incurred when buying and owning a home. Keep your receipts for closing costs, property taxes, mortgage interest and home improvement invoices.

**Other expenses**

It is a good idea to save documents and receipts from medical bills, education costs, and business expenses that were not reimbursed by your employer. Talk with a tax professional about how these expenses may apply to your personal tax return.
Activate

Healthy family activities

During the holidays you will spend less time at the office and more time with friends and family at home. Keep boredom at bay and make this an active time instead of spending the day in front of the TV or around the kitchen table. Here are a few ideas to get up and moving during the holidays.

• Build a snowman
• Walk
• Charades
• Dance to holiday music
• Walk or run for charity
• Ice skating
• Volunteer
• Neighborhood nature scavenger hunt
• Ask your gym for guest passes
• Snowshoeing
• Indoor swimming
• Sock tag
• Sledding
• “Simon Says” with exercises
• Bowling

Apple sweet potatoes

Serves: 8  
Total Time: 75 min | Prep: 15 min | Cook: 60 min

Ingredients:
- 3 medium sized red apples
- 4 sweet potatoes
- ½ cup candied pecans or walnuts, chopped
- ¼ tsp. pumpkin pie spice
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. pepper
- 1 tbsp. olive oil

Directions:
Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Peel sweet potatoes and cut into 1 inch cubes. Place sweet potatoes in a 9x13 inch cake pan. Drizzle the sweet potatoes with 1 tbsp. olive oil and sprinkle on ½ tsp. salt, ½ tsp. pepper, and ¼ tsp. of pumpkin pie spice. Toss until well mixed. De-core and peel apples, and cut into 1 inch cubes. Lay the cubed apples over top of the sweet potatoes. Cover with tin foil and bake for one hour, stirring mid-way. Sprinkle the chopped nuts over the top immediately before serving.

Nutrition Facts:
- Calories: 206  |  Total Fat: 12g  |  Sodium: 222mg  |  Total Carbohydrates: 23g
- Dietary Fiber: 4g  |  Total Protein: 2g