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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Making Time to Plan for the Holidays Eases the Stress of the Season

The holidays can be a stressful time of year. Many of us find ourselves forgetting to prioritize our health as we struggle to juggle a never ending to-do list. This December, the Eastern Highlands Health District is reminding residents of the importance of keeping up on their self-care and staying safe this holiday season. Below are some of the leading holiday stressors and some strategies to help you manage your stress this holiday season:

Plan Your Time and Stick To Your Holiday Budget

- While there is still time between now and the upcoming holidays the calendar is your secret weapon! Take a moment to slow down and decide what events are important to you. Remove items that are low priority or can wait until after the holidays and focus on what items are important this time of year. Don't be afraid to say "no."
- Try not to over commit and leave some "wiggle room" for unexpected events that arise.
- Make lists of items you will need and stores you need to go to. By grouping tasks together ahead of time you can minimize the stress of last minute scrambling.
- Make a spending plan which may include gifts, food for parties, wrapping paper, decorations and travel. Keep this list with you at all times and stick to it.
- Try to shop early in the season. Last minute shoppers tend to spend more money. Consider online gift shopping as a way to save time and money.
- Communicate your gift expectations to family and friends. Consider creative, meaningful and low-cost gift ideas such as offering baby-sitting duties or doing household chores for a loved one. Find a link to some creative gift ideas on www.ehhd.org/healthyholidays.

Establish a Stress Management Routine

According to the American Psychology Association at least 61% of Americans experience increased levels of stress during the holidays. Director of the Eastern Highlands Health District Robert Miller comments that "stress and depression are leading causes of poor mental health. Instead of letting stress harm your health and ruin your holidays it's important to be realistic, plan ahead and seek help and support when needed." EHHD recommends engaging in at least one stress reducing, self-care activities during the holidays such as:

- "Unplug" from technology for at least one hour per day.
- Take a yoga or fitness class. If you don't have time to get to a class try a short video online at home. Anything is better than nothing!
- Take a breather. Set aside 15 "distraction free" minutes per day for yourself to write down what's on your mind, meditate, and find some inner peace.

- Aim to get 7-8 hours of sleep per night. If you have trouble falling asleep make sure all of your electronics are off and try an “unwinding” routine such as listening to some calming music or reading a relaxing book.
- Don’t abandon your healthy habits. Drink at least 8 cups of water per day, get in at least 5 cups of fruits and veggies, and don’t over indulge in treats. Weight gain from holiday food and lack of exercise can add to holiday stress and anxiety.
- Stay active! Even 15-30 minutes of exercise per day can help you manage stress and help you burn off calories from holiday treats.
- As the winter months get colder don’t be afraid to get outside and play! Try a new activity such as ice skating, snow shoeing, a winter 5k road race, snow tubing, cross country skiing or simply taking a hike through the woods in the snow. If you’re going outdoors in extreme temperatures, be sure to wear a base, mid and outer layer to retain as much heat as possible. Get some winter clothing layering tips at ehhd.org/healthyholidays.

Prepare For a Safe Winter Season

New England is famous for blizzards and winter snow storms. Be sure to have the following supplies on hand during a winter storm:

- One week’s worth of drinking water and canned/no-cook food such as dried fish, nut butter, crackers and dried fruit)
- Non-electric can opener
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- First aid kit and prescription drugs
- Supply of cat litter or bag of sand to add traction on walkways
- Battery-powered lamps or lanterns (avoid using candles to prevent the risk of fire)
- Warm clothes, windshield scraper, flares, water, snacks, tools, and blankets in your car

EHHD would like to remind residents to please sign up for their “notification list serv” on their website, www.ehhd.org, to receive updates on winter storms and winter safety tips.

Don’t let the holiday and winter season be something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can take hold during the holidays. Learn to recognize stressor triggers such as lack of time and financial pressures so you can recognize them and prevent them from harming your health. With a little planning and preparation you can enjoy a peaceful, joyous and safe holiday season. For more information, such as local healthy living activities and links to healthy recipes, please visit www.ehhd.org/healthyholidays.