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information | for your life

10 TIPS for Green Spring Cleaning

Family Mealtime— FAMILY UNITY

Family mealtimes are becoming a thing of the past. Don't let this happen to your family! Research has shown that the family mealtime is an important ritual that ties a family together and makes it stronger. Make it a priority for your family. Most families will have to restructure their schedules to begin this tradition, and it may not happen every evening, but if your family decides that it is valuable, it just may grow into a regular event. The important thing is to begin. Set a date that the whole family can come together for a meal.

It is usually the evening meal that families are able to come together to eat. If you are beginning a new tradition, take the time to make it special. Turn the television off, put on some soft music, set a pretty table, and even light a candle occasionally. This helps to show your family that you value them and that this time together is important. Involve the family in the planning and preparation of the meal. Young children especially love to be involved, and it helps prepare older children for the time when they will be taking care of themselves. A bonus for the whole family is the likelihood that the foods you eat during your family dinners will be healthier than those grabbed on the run.

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It's that time of year again — time to get down and dirty with a thorough spring cleaning. Our homes have been shut up all winter and most are in need of some freshening. This year, give your house a green spring cleaning by avoiding dangerous chemicals and harsh cleaners. There are healthier ways to do it — for you and the environment.

Did you know that indoor air pollution in our homes can be as much as 100 times worse than outdoor air pollution? Most of that pollution comes from the evaporation of VOC's (volatile organic compounds) or the "offgas" from cleaning supplies, air fresheners, and home decorating items like paint, wallpaper, and carpeting. While we think we're cleaning and disinfecting our homes, we're really loading the air with toxic chemicals.

10 TIPS FOR GREEN SPRING CLEANING

1. Open the windows. The best way to get dirty air moving out and fresh air moving in is to open the doors and windows. Feel the breeze.
2. Skip the air fresheners. Chemical fresheners can cause eye, skin, and respiratory irritation. Aerosol air fresheners are even worse — the tiny air-borne particles can damage nerves and lodge in your lungs. Buy fresh flowers in lieu of traditional air fresheners. An open box of baking soda, cedar blocks, and dried flowers also add natural fragrance to the room.
3. Use vegetable-based cleaning products instead of harsh chemical cleaners. Vegetable-based cleaners, like those made with coconut oil, are becoming more popular every day. Even the makers of Clorox have a vegetable-based cleaning line on the market. Choose vegetable-based dishwashing detergent too. (I just learned that traditional dish detergent is made from petroleum. If every family replaced just one 28 oz. bottle of petroleum-based dish detergent with a vegetable-based product, we could save 82,000 barrels of oil.)

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4. Vinegar, vinegar, and more vinegar. Nature's cleaning miracle, vinegar can be used to clean just about anything. Use it straight to clean kitchen floors or wash windows, mix it with baking soda and essential oils to clean sinks, and even use it to remove stains in your carpet.
5. Get some baking soda too. Multi-purpose baking soda can be used for everything from freshening the air, carpet, or furniture to scrubbing the toilet and tub.
6. Don't use bleach or any cleaners containing chlorine. The problems with chlorine bleach are numerous — it can burn skin and eyes and prove fatal if swallowed. When it goes down the drain, it becomes toxic to the natural world too. An herbal-based sanitizer or one by Seventh Generation is a good alternative, as is just plain old hot water and soap. White vinegar also works wonders. (see #4)
7. Skip the harsh chemical cleaners in the bathroom. Make that porcelain sparkle with non-chlorine bleach cleaners or white vinegar and a baking soda-water paste. (See #5)

8. Use natural fiber sponges and rags to do the cleaning. Avoid using paper towels and other one-time use tools.
9. Skip the antibacterial soap. It's just not necessary. The widespread use of antibacterial soap is also leading to antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria.
10. When you make the switch to natural cleaning products, be sure to safely dispose of any dangerous chemical products. Don't pour them down the drain, into the ground, or into the trash. Read the labels or check with your waste management provider for options.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (n.d.). In *Teaming up to save energy: Protect our environment through energy efficiency*. Retrieved August 16, 2016, from <http://www.energystar.gov>

Hutto Texas Website. (Updated 3/18/11). *10 tips for green spring cleaning*. Gardner, A. Retrieved October 2, 2016, from <http://www.huttotx.gov/documentcenter/view/1451>.

Family Mealtime— FAMILY UNITY

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The meal doesn't need to be fancy. It isn't the food that makes the time special; it is the reconnecting that occurs among the members of the family during this time they have set aside. Use this time to share the important things that have happened in the life of each family member during the day. Empathize with one another and offer support where it is needed. Mealtime is an opportunity for lively conversation and learning. Talk about world events on a level that children can understand. Help your children learn the fine art of conversation. Tell your life's stories and share your values. Teach good table manners by example.

Throughout history, the purpose behind eating meals has been more than just to relieve hunger. Meals have provided a time to gather with the community and fellowship together. Consider your family, no matter how large or small, as your most important community, and make some great memories as you sit down to share regular meals with those you love.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2016). *Family mealtime—Family unity*. Raleigh, NC: Author.



CHOOSING a Camp

Summer is nearly here. If you are considering camp as an option for your child, these steps can help you find the camp that is the right fit for your child.

STEP 1

Before agreeing to send your child to summer camp, answer these questions:

- What do we expect our child to accomplish/experience at camp?
- Would a day camp, resident camp, or a travel camp be best?
- What length of time do we want for this camping experience?
- How much money do we want to spend?

STEP 2

Choosing an appropriate summer camp is seldom as easy as picking the nearest one - so a little advance research is in order.

1. Camp Types and Duration

Day Camps ... are operated on a campsite for any part of the day, but less than 24 hours a day, usually for children from four to 12 years of age. Camp sessions usually operate four to eight hours per day and from four to 10 days per session. They may

be best for the young camper just beginning the camping experience.

Residential Camps ... operate at a permanent campsite for five or more days and nights and usually serve children from eight to 17 years old. Campers remain overnight. Camp sessions run from one week up to eight-week all-summer experiences. They may be best for a camper who has had a previous away-from-home experience.

Travel Camps ... move from one site to another, visiting various attractions along the way. Campers, usually adolescents, generally travel by canoe, horse, bicycle, boat or on foot. Previous camp experience is usually beneficial. Sessions may last from five days up to three weeks.

2. Camp Sponsorship

Knowing the camp sponsorship will help you determine the camp's philosophy and its population focus. Camps are privately sponsored, operated by youth serving agencies such as the Boy or Girl Scouts and by religiously oriented organizations. Some camps serve special populations such as children with learning disabilities or physical handicaps. Public and private schools, as well as governmental units, operate camping programs.

3. Camp Activities

Match the camp's activities to the child's needs and desires. A wide variety of activities make up the various camping programs. Campcraft, such as outdoor cooking, toolcraft and ropecraft, are common. High-adventure activities, including canoeing, sailing, waterskiing, archery, horseback riding, team sports, ropes courses, and swimming are out there to be enjoyed.

STEP 3

Identify several camps that seem to fit with your identified desires.

Not all camps need to be [licensed](#). A program may call itself a camp and not be required to have a license because it does not fall under the definition of a camp as contained in the licensing law. A camp that is not licensed should not necessarily be disqualified. Before you choose to send your child to a non-licensed camp, you should ask the director about the quality of the program, safety, staffing, and health.

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Take My Stress PLEASE!

A lighthearted approach can help people stand up to life's challenges.

By Pati Nash



With the power to relieve stress, reduce anxiety and increase mental energy, laughter really is a darn good medicine. But we know that, right? Who hasn't tried to use humor to soften an adversary, calm an upset friend, or break the ice at a big event? But looking at the funny side is more than a crisis tool. Stress expert Loretta LaRoche sees it as a daily way of life. Behavioral Health Newsline explored her unique take on stress management in this Q&A.

Is there a difference between good stress and bad stress?

Oh yes. You need stress. It helps you manage your life and propels you to be successful. It even designates what is dangerous and what is not. That's why we have a fight-or-flight response. Because if you're on the highway and a car goes into your lane, you better well have a stress response.

So when does good stress become bad stress? When does it cross that line?

Think of the circus performer with the plates twirling on sticks. There comes a point when he's twirling too many plates and they start dropping. Or think of an instrument like a Stradivarius. When the strings are the right tension, it plays beautifully. But when they get too tight, you get a squeaky sound. The human body responds the same way. When it starts to feel overloaded, it starts to give you signals. You start to get physical responses. You may get heart palpitations or headaches, backaches and gastrointestinal problems. In other words, nothing seems to make you feel good. You start to feel irritable, you overreact.

And this is where stress management comes in. How can we manage our stress if we all need it?

One has to really be aware of his or her bodily responses. I think the problem is that sometimes people have actually forgotten what it means to be well; having a feeling of wellness. It's where you don't have aches and pains, you're able to get through the day with a lot of energy and you're getting good sleep. When you start to get the other signals, you have to step aside and say to yourself: "It seems to me like I'm out of control."

You believe humor is a major part of managing stress, but how can people who aren't as naturally funny as you bring humor into their lives?

When I say humor, I mean that humor as a kind of umbrella to hold over yourself to live a lighthearted life. You don't have to be a comedian. It's about putting on a lighter lens to see life with more clarity, rather than through a dark lens, which leads to feeling like you're in a vampire movie. So forget the comedy or being funny. What you really want to do is to take your life more lightly instead of seriously. Take your work seriously, take your life lightly.

Have you seen people do that successfully?

Oh yes. I think you see it once someone recognizes that life is not a stress rehearsal. You have to recognize that you are not immortal. You are not going to be here forever. What do you want to do with the time that you have? Do you want to spend eight hours of every day complaining, moaning and gathering forces around you to feel like a victim? Or do you want to take that time and make your day more joyful, more flexible, and easier on yourself and everyone around you? *continued on page 5*

So how do people put that kind of perspective on things?

Put that list of five things on your desk. And take a look at them periodically when you're getting stressed and say, "Wow, this really isn't as important as I think it is." Because I always say yesterday's tragedy turns into today's comedy. How many of us have laughed over some incident that we initially thought was just so incredibly dramatic?

Why does life seem more stressful these days?

The fact that technology is created and obliterated so quickly creates a lot of stress. I learn a program and then I'm told six months later we are replacing that with a different program. Never before in history have we discovered and rediscovered things so quickly. I don't want to sound like I don't think we should move forward—we are never going to go back to my grandmother's time. But I think we have to blend the two. In the studies on stress, one constant appears over and over again. And that is without support from friends or families or coworkers—social support—you will become ill and die sooner. And loneliness and depression are at an all-time high in this society.

What does research tell us about stress?

If you keep triggering that response throughout the day, maybe several hundred times a day, you are going to get yourself into a pickle. Your body is going to become eroded by the toxicity of this response. This is when the body starts to break down. You get sick more often when your immune system is compromised by stress.

I've read that it is not major catastrophes in our lives that erode us but the little stresses that wreak havoc on us. Is that true?

Sure, it's like going through bramble bushes. You walk and you cut yourself here and you cut yourself there and pretty soon you go to bed and you have all these little pains and aches all over you and you are saying, "What happened?" Your whole body is full of cuts from the brambles. I think that's what happens during the day, and it's like a domino effect.

Do you recommend meditation for calming down?

Definitely. I tell people to spend 15 to 20 minutes a day just calming themselves, whether it is through meditation or even prayer. A lot of repetitive activities become meditative, like knitting or needlepoint.

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Take My Stress PLEASE!

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You tell people that too often we make everything into catastrophes, that a wet towel on the bed is not a mugging.

I think one of the best ways to deal with this is to take five things that you feel are the worst possible things that could ever happen to you or your family and use those to put other things that stress you out in perspective. For example, if you have a child and that child was abducted and you never saw him again, how would that relate to your computer crashing? Take five things that really would create a crisis, like if you found out you only had 6 months to live. Would you be that concerned about your e-mail not coming in?



CHOOSING a Camp

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Step 4

Talk to the camp director.

Camp staff are willing to answer questions and discuss the purpose and objectives of their program.

- Ask for references from previous campers.
- Ask about the camp's behavior management plan and visitation policy.
- Ask your neighbor, school counselor and church leader for their opinions.
- Visit the camp.
- Check the safety record of the camps under consideration.

Adapted from Michigan.gov. LARA Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. *Choosing a camp* (nd). Retrieved October 2, 2016. http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-63294_27723-82314--,00.html

Take My Stress PLEASE!

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And exercise is a wonderful way to reduce stress. If you get into a kickboxing class or an aerobics class, the repetition plus the activity stops the mind in its tracks. It is very hard to skip rope and make yourself crazy about the fax machine.

What are some good resources for stress management?

Books by David Burns or Albert Ellis. Davis Burns' classic is "Feeling Good, the New Mood Therapy." He's done wonders for depressed or anxious people. Counseling is also helpful. Go sit and talk to a party who is not involved in what you do. Because often what we do is we get people around us to validate our disturbing behavior. We say, "Don't you feel this way?" and they say, "Absolutely." And what we need is someone to say, "No, this is not how you are supposed to feel. This behavior is not serving you."

Nash, P. (Reviewed 2016). *Take my stress please!* Raleigh NC: Workplace Options.