Don’t Let Negative Thoughts Control You
During difficult times it’s easy to get overwhelmed with strong emotions like anxiety, sadness or anger. What we don’t often recognize is that there are specific thoughts that help fuel those emotions and keep us stuck.

Notice the Thoughts
The first step in overcoming the negative thoughts is to hit the pause button and recognize what your mind is saying. It could be, “I’m not good enough,” or “nobody likes me,” countless “what ifs,” or critical statements you heard repeatedly as a child. Once you’re aware of the thoughts, you can do something about them.

Question the Thoughts
First ask yourself, “is this thought true?” And if it’s not, you probably don’t make decisions based on false statements. If the thought is true, then ask yourself, “is this thought helpful?” Sometimes the negative thought can be helpful in leading you to prepare for a situation or make changes in yourself. But often the negative thoughts swirling in our heads are neither true, nor helpful.

Shift Your Attention
When you’ve identified the thoughts and answered that they aren’t true or helpful, then it’s time to take action so they don’t continue impacting you. Look around the room and focus on using your five senses to truly notice little details about objects you see. Being fully present and noticing the world around you takes you out of your own head and reduces the impact of those intrusive thoughts. Even better would be to do something actively while being attentive to your environment. Take a walk. Color. Call a friend. Do something you enjoy. Focusing on an activity mindfully makes it more difficult for negative thoughts to grab your attention and make you feel awful.

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SHINE One-on-One Medicare Counseling: Dec. 2 and 16 at Countryside Library (2642 Sabal Springs Drive) and Dec. 9 at the Main Library (100 N. Osceola Ave.) from 10:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.. SHINE is a free program offered by the Florida Department of Elder Affairs and your local Area Agency on Aging. Specially-trained volunteers can assist with Medicare, Medicaid and health insurance questions by providing one-on-one counseling and information. Services are free, unbiased and confidential. Register at myclearwaterlibrary.librarymarket.com.

Coping with Stress and Anxiety: Wednesday, Dec. 4 (noon) at the Aging Well Center at the Long Center, 1501 N. Belcher Road. Discover how to understand stress and anxiety on a deeper level. You’ll also learn about their sources and effects and the help that’s available. Tracy Daniels, M.A., Behavioral Health Therapist, will lead this presentation. For more information and to register, call 253-4076.

LEARN:

FREE PROGRAMS UNLESS SPECIFIED

WORK:

PRACTICING GRATITUDE AT THE OFFICE

Now is the time of year when gratitude becomes more a part of our mindset, so why not cultivate that gratitude in the workplace?

- Post a gratitude tree in a high traffic area of the office and have leaves or flowers cut out for employees to post what they are grateful for. If you have a big office, make it a creative and fun competition and have teams create their own gratitude project.
- Take your gratitude further and do an office service project. This could be anything from building a home through Habitat for Humanity, contributing to a local toy drive or by partnering with a local church to adopt a family in need and provide them with items to make their holiday more joyful. You will be amazed at the positive energy you can generate by working together as a team to bring joy to someone’s life that may need it the most.
- Take your office party to the next level with a gratitude exercise as part of the celebration. Have team members draw the name of someone they work closely with and write a heartfelt thank you note for what they contribute to the team. That thank you will go a lot farther than a $5 gift card or coffee mug.
- Make a point of highlighting the successes of 2019 and taking the time to celebrate. Too often we are caught in the marathon of “what’s next” and forget to enjoy the here and now. What a better way to look back with thanks on 2019 then to celebrate the past year in a public way.
**EnhanceFitness**: A group-based exercise class that helps with balance, strength and arthritis for those 55 and up. Classes meet three times per week for 60 minutes. Classes are held at the Long Center and YMCA locations. To register, call 379-2473.

**Holiday Extravaganza**: Nov. 30-Dec. 22 in Downtown Clearwater. Celebrate the holidays with family-friendly events throughout the season. For more information and pricing, visit downtownclearwater.com.

**Miracle on Cleveland Street**: Saturday, Dec. 7 in Downtown Clearwater. Cleveland Street will transform into a winter wonderland with free activities, live music and food. For more information and pricing, visit rutheckerdhall.com/miracle.

**Santa and Suds 5K**: Sunday, Dec. 8 in Downtown Clearwater. Get your holiday hats and elf shirts on and run in the annual Santa and Suds 5K. For more information and pricing, visit santask.racehawk.com.

**Island Estates Boat Parade**: Saturday, Dec. 14 at Coachman Park. Watch as more than 60 decorated boats line up and pass through the Mandalay and Clearwater Marina channels. For more information, visit clearwateryachtclub.org.

**Say No to Drugs Race**: Saturday, Dec. 14 at Coachman Park. More than 300 people will race across Clearwater’s Memorial Causeway Bridge. For more information and pricing, visit saynotodrugs.com.

**Outback Bowl Beach Day**: Monday, Dec. 30 at Hilton Clearwater Beach and Pier 60. Celebrate with the Outback Bowl football teams, their marching bands and cheerleaders. For more information, visit outbackbowl.com.

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**Tips from the Trainer: THRIVING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS!**

Do you have a love-hate relationship with the holidays? It is a common feeling to be excited about the “idea” of the holidays, but deep down do you dread the added stress and struggles that accompany this time of year. Most times, the stress comes from self-imposed unrealistic demands and expectations. When this occurs, it is very important to release the stress by taking care of yourself properly. Then you can enjoy the holidays healthy and mostly stress free.

The holidays should be fun, but instead, they can be wracked with anxiety and sometimes even depression. To alleviate this, take control and stop placing unrealistic demands on yourself. For instance, when enjoying the many holiday treats, make the goal to maintain your weight, not weight loss. Achieve the goal by taking multiple movement breaks during the day and then increase the visits to the gym after the holidays.

As the holiday parties abound, ten minutes of walking three times a day can be a big boost to your metabolism and help you maintain your fitness level. I am a big believer in celebrating and enjoying those indulgences, but in moderation. You don’t need to deny yourself any of your favorite treats, but a good way to proceed is skip the ordinary and enjoy the extraordinary. Try just a taste of something instead of a whole portion. Do not go to parties hungry. Eat a nutritious meal or snack and drink plenty of water ahead so you will not be tempted to overindulge.

Most importantly, this time of year is about family and friends. This can be a very difficult time for some, as many struggle with a wide variety of issues. It is especially nice during this time of year to reach out and touch the spirit of another person. By doing this, you might make their day or even their holiday season. These acts do not need to be lavish or extravagant. They can be as simple as buying someone their holiday meal, sharing a smile, a kind word or just a few moments of your precious time.

Take care of yourself, spend time with loved ones, take time with someone in need and you will thrive this holiday season.

Jeanmarie Scordino M.Ed., FAFS
Exercise Physiologist
GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE-SLIMMED

Total: 1 hr 5 min  
Prep: 45 min  
Cook: 20 min  
Yield: 6 servings

Directions
1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Put the shallots (in their skins) on a small baking dish, roast until soft, about 30 minutes. When cool enough to handle, skin and coarsely chop the shallots. Set aside.

2. Bring a medium-large saucepan of water to a boil over high heat. Add kosher salt, to taste. Add the green beans and cook, uncovered, until crisp-tender and bright green, about 3 minutes. Drain the beans in a colander and rinse with cold water. Transfer the beans to a large bowl.

3. Melt the butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour and cook, stirring with a wooden spoon, until golden, about 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in the broth, increase the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Add the shallots, one teaspoon of the thyme, and remaining 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook until thickened, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes. Pour the sauce over the vegetables and stir to combine evenly.

4. Spray a 2-quart baking dish with vegetable cooking spray. Transfer the vegetable mixture to the pan. Add the remaining 2 teaspoons of thyme to bread crumbs and scatter over the vegetables. Bake uncovered until the sauce bubbles and the crumbs brown, about 20 minutes.


EGGPLANT CAPONATA

Total: 25 min  
Cook: 25 min  
Serves 6

Directions
1. Cook one chopped onion in a skillet with 1/4 cup olive oil, 3 minutes. Add one each chopped celery stalk and eggplant; cook 4 minutes. Add one chopped red bell pepper and cook 3 minutes. Add 3 tablespoons golden raisins, some chopped oregano and 1/2 cup water, simmer 8 minutes. Add one cup halved grape tomatoes and one tablespoon each cider vinegar and capers; cook 7 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and top with torn basil.