



HOW TO HANDLE A "Ruff" HOLIDAY SEASON

The season of giving is upon us, and for a near majority of adults, this means an increase in daily stress. If you're feeling more anxious, on edge, or all-around overwhelmed, you're not alone. The American Psychiatric Association recently found that 41% of adults report their stress levels increase during the holidays.

What's the cause of this stress? Some cite financial issues, like not having enough money to cover holiday expenses; others cite loneliness, like not having loved ones to spend time with or feeling ostracized/anxious spending time with the family they do have.

If you're feeling similar, have you considered turning to man's best friend?

During the holiday season, animal shelters feel the brunt of the seasonal stress, too. In many places in the nation, it's colder outside, so there are more animals looking for warmth that may find their way to a shelter, thus filling the kennels to capacity. With fuller kennels, there's a greater need for food, blankets, healthcare and quality time, but only so many staff members and volunteers to go around.

Volunteering at a nearby animal shelter might brighten your spirit in more ways than one.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, both dogs and cats as pets have an overwhelming positive impact on their owners' mental health. Respondents asserted that pets:

- 🐾 Help reduce stress and anxiety (69%)
- 🐾 Provide unconditional love and support (69%)
- 🐾 Offer companionship (69%)
- 🐾 Provide a calming presence (66%)
- 🐾 Are true supportive friends (63%)

You may not have the time, resources or the lifestyle for a full-time pet, but there are other ways to interact with animals at the shelter for mutual benefits! You might consider:

WALKING. You're not the only one who feels anxiety in uncomfortable situations; full shelters can make dogs and cats feel on edge, too. Taking a dog out of a noisy shelter for only 30 minutes can help them relax, stretch their legs and let their personality shine through.

PETTING or spending time with them. Cats don't need walks often, but they do need companionship. Similar to dog walking, your local shelter may have a need for "cat cuddlers."

DONATING food, supplies or toys.

If you're short on time but have the financial bandwidth, donating anything on an animal shelter's wish list near the holidays is a meaningful gift that keeps on giving. It also makes you feel like part of a community when you help an organization in need.

OFFERING SPECIAL SKILLS. Maybe you're great at graphic design, social media, or photography; maybe you're a numbers whiz and enjoy accounting. Consider pitching your unique skills to your local shelter to discover if they have a need for a volunteer to help during the busy season.

FOSTERING. Home for the holidays alone? Consider fostering over Thanksgiving or Christmas to have a companion. This also gives the dog or cat you choose an opportunity to acclimate themselves to life outside the shelter. You never know, you might just find your new best friend!

*Even a Joyous Holiday Season Can Cause Stress for Most Americans," American Psychological Association, [apa.org](https://www.apa.org), Accessed October 20, 2025.

*Americans Note Overwhelming Positive Mental Health Impact of Their Pets," American Psychiatric Association, [psychiatry.org](https://www.psychiatry.org), Accessed October 20, 2025.

YOUR FESTIVE

CRANBERRY WHIPPED FETA DIP



Prep Time: 10 minutes Cook Time: 10 minutes Serves: 6

INGREDIENTS

For the cranberries

- 2 cups frozen or fresh cranberries
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- zest and juice of one orange
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg

For the whipped feta

- 225 g (8oz) feta cheese, (about 1 ½ cups of crumbled feta)
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ tsp chili flakes
- 1-2 tbsp honey to drizzle
- fresh thyme, if desired

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium saucepan, add the cranberries, maple syrup, orange zest, orange juice and nutmeg and bring the mix to a boil over medium-high heat.
2. Once boiling, turn to medium-low heat and keep at a simmer for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally or until the cranberries have burst and start to reduce to a jam-like consistency. Once done, remove from heat and set aside to cool.
3. Whip the feta by adding feta cheese, Greek yogurt, chili flakes and olive oil to a food processor and blend the mix on high until smooth and creamy. (You can also blend using an immersion blender).
4. Once the cranberries have cooled, assemble the dip by layering the whipped feta in a low bowl. Top with the cranberry compote, chopped walnuts, a drizzle of honey and fresh thyme leaves, if desired.
5. Serve with fresh-cut crudites, like baby cucumbers. Enjoy!

TIP: Prepare both the feta portion and the cranberry compote in advance and store them in the fridge separately. Take them out about a half hour before assembling the dip so they stay fresh, and so they can come to room temperature.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 Calories: 263 Carbohydrates: 22.8g Protein: 8.8g Fat: 16.1g Sodium: 388.3mg Fiber: 3.3g Sugar: 15g

Recipe adapted from cookinginmygenes.com



Winter Wellness Routine Refresh

As the days get shorter and the temperatures drop, it's easy for healthy habits to slip into hibernation mode. But winter doesn't have to mean slowing down your self-care or skipping movement altogether. In fact, this season offers a great opportunity to refresh your wellness routine, find new ways to stay active and focus on restorative habits that support your overall wellbeing.

Stay Active and Warm

Colder weather might make outdoor exercise less appealing, but it doesn't have to stop you. Indoor activities like yoga, Pilates, strength training or dance workouts can help you maintain consistency and boost your mood. If you enjoy the crisp air, try brisk walks, winter hikes or even snowshoeing — just be sure to layer up and warm up properly to prevent injury.

Prioritize Recovery and Rest

Winter is a natural time to slow down and recharge. Use this season to focus on recovery — both physically and mentally. Make time for stretching, foam rolling and getting quality sleep. A consistent bedtime routine and limiting screen time before bed can make a big difference in your energy and resilience.

Nourish and Hydrate

When it's cold, you may not feel as thirsty, but hydration remains just as important as

it is in summer. Herbal teas, soups and warm lemon water can help you stay hydrated and cozy. Also, aim to fill your plate with seasonal produce like root vegetables, citrus fruits and leafy greens to support immunity and overall health.

Boost Your Mood

Sunlight can be scarce in winter, which can affect energy levels and mood. Take advantage of daylight whenever possible — open the curtains, step outside for a short walk or sit by a bright window. You can also explore light therapy lamps or vitamin D supplements (check with your healthcare provider first).

Action Steps for a Healthier Winter

- Schedule at least three active sessions each week, even if they're short.
- Stick to a consistent sleep routine, aiming for seven to nine hours each night.
- Add seasonal fruits and veggies to every meal to stay nourished.
- Keep a water bottle nearby and track your daily hydration.
- Get 10 to 15 minutes of natural sunlight each day to boost mood and energy.

"6 Tips to Stay Active This Winter," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cdc.gov, Accessed November 6, 2025.

"The Importance of Winter Hydration," Massachusetts General Hospital, massgeneral.org, Accessed November 6, 2025.