

IN THIS ISSUE

**Holiday Presence:
Gratitude and Giving Back
to the Community**

Additional Resources

Upcoming Wise & Well Webinar –
Register Now!

Monthly Moves

Be Thankful for Your Knees

Recipe

Cozy Roasted Vegetable Butternut
Squash Lasagna



Wise & Well

Welcome to the Wise & Well Newsletter, where we promote whole-person wellbeing each month and highlight health-related topics to help you be your best.

Gratitude and Giving Back to the Community

The end of the year is once again here, and the chill in the air is coming in hot. Wasn't it just a moment ago that late summer days, with their waning heat and humidity, compelled us to stay out and play a little longer? Today, it's dark at 6:00 p.m., and the chill at dusk is crisp enough for coats and mittens, nudging us back toward the warmth of cozy homes and the gratitude we feel for the folks within them.

November is when the hustling and bustling of the holiday season starts to stretch its legs, filling our days to the brim with errands, deadlines and the steady beat of lovely, seasonal delights. For tucked inside the rush is a reminder to pause, to breathe, to look up from to-do lists and give thanks for what matters most. It's a month that invites us to balance the weight of responsibility with the lightness of gratitude; gratitude for our families, our communities and the small, everyday kindnesses that make this life worth living.

Giving back

We tend to think of giving back as something we do for others. And of course, it is — when you volunteer your time, donate to a cause or lend a hand to a friend, you're significantly improving someone else's day, week or maybe even their whole outlook on life. Not bad, you might say. But there's something even better at play, a great big, beneficial bonus that the best of us don't always stop to notice: giving back is also profoundly good for us!

Research shows that giving and gratitude don't just create warm, fuzzy feelings. They can improve both mental and physical wellbeing in measurable ways. Psychologists explain that when we give, whether it's time, money or energy, our brains release "feel-good" chemicals like serotonin, dopamine and endorphins. Those natural boosts can lower stress, reduce anxiety and lift our moods. The ripple effects extend to the physical as well: volunteering has been linked to lower blood pressure, a healthier immune system and even longer lifespans.

In other words, giving really is a win-win. Others benefit from your generosity, and you benefit from the joy and sense of purpose that generosity creates.

Gratitude

Gratitude and giving are closely connected. Gratitude reminds us to notice the good around us, to take it all in. Giving, then, becomes a natural extension of that awareness. Think about the last time someone showed you kindness. Maybe a coworker jumped in to help you finish a project, or a friend listened when you needed to vent. Did you ever reflect on that later and feel a pull to either pay it forward or lend a hand to someone else who clearly needed it? That's gratitude in action, motivating generosity.

And gratitude itself has powerful benefits. Studies have found that practicing gratitude can improve sleep, reduce stress and strengthen relationships. When we take a moment to appreciate what we have, and especially who we have, we shift our focus away from what's missing. That shift helps us feel more grounded, connected, and optimistic.

Simple Ways to Give Back this Season

Now that we're all a little wiser, let's wrap up with a few simple ways to give back this holiday season; some wellbeing boosters from the Wise & Well team to help keep you wise and well.

Given that the most meaningful gestures are often the simplest, here are a few ideas perfect for busy schedules and tight budgets:

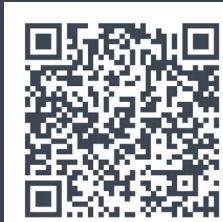
Start small: Write a thank-you note to a coworker who helped you this year. Send a text of appreciation to a friend. Hold the door for a stranger or let someone cut ahead in traffic. Even a kind word or lighthearted compliment to your favorite barista can brighten both your days. These tiny acts ripple outward.

Additional Resources

Upcoming Wise & Well Webinar — Register Now!

Topic: Gratitude as a Superpower: Cultivating Peace, Abundance, and Connection

When: Tuesday, November 4 | Noon – 1:00 p.m. ET



To register, [click here](#) or scan the QR code. For more information, view the [Employee Flyer](#).

Join us to cultivate gratitude and set the tone for a holiday season filled with peace, presence and purpose.

Remember, you can access our [Wise & Well Training Center](#) for the most up-to-date information on our upcoming events, along with a plethora of additional wellbeing-related resources.

Volunteer in short bursts: Not everyone has time to commit to a long-term project, and that's okay. Look for "micro-volunteering" opportunities: spending an hour at a local food pantry, joining a toy drive or delivering meals to neighbors.

Share your skills: If you love cooking, make an extra batch for someone in need. If you knit, consider donating hats or scarves. If you're tech-savvy, help a nonprofit with its website or social media.

Give as a family: Children often love being included in acts of kindness. Choose a charity together, help pack donation boxes or volunteer at a community event. These experiences can become traditions that stick for years to come.

Balance the season: The holidays can bring stress, consumerism and endless to-do lists. Think of generosity as an antidote — a way to reconnect with what really matters and step away from the noise.

Be Intentional

Experts note that not all acts of generosity feel the same. Giving because you feel pressured or obligated probably won't yield the same benefits as giving with genuine intention. What matters most for your wellbeing is the mindset behind the act. When you choose to help someone because you want to, and when you can see the positive difference you've made, the rewards, emotional and physical, are stronger.

But remember, there's no threshold you need to hit. You're not LeBron James trying to score 60,000 gratitude points. You don't have to volunteer every weekend or donate large sums of money. Small, everyday acts of kindness add up to create a lasting positive impact for both you and the people around you. Besides, if you give too much or find yourself overextended, physically exhausted, emotionally drained or feeling like your efforts don't matter, you're missing the point.

Generosity should lift you up, not wear you down.

In fact, only the year should be winding down. Gratitude and generosity are just getting started. Let them be the steady fuel that keeps us moving, the warmth that keeps the chill at bay, and the joy that reminds us what it truly means to be wise and well.

Source: clevelandclinic.org



Monthly Moves

Be Thankful for Your Knees

Our knees work hard for us every day. They carry us through long walks, workouts and even those quick dashes to catch the elevator. Taking time to strengthen them is one way to show a little gratitude for all they do. Strong knees help prevent pain, improve balance and keep you moving with confidence.

Try these simple moves, five days a week for four weeks, to build strength and stability.

Seated Knee Extension

Sit tall with your legs uncrossed. Straighten one knee fully and squeeze your thigh muscle before lowering it back down. Switch legs and repeat, keeping your movements slow and controlled.

The goal: 3 sets of 8-15 reps

Sit-to-Stand Squats

Sit at the edge of a chair with your knees bent. Press through your heels to rise to standing, then lower yourself back down slowly and repeat.

The goal: 3 sets of 8-15 reps

Standing Hamstring Curls

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Shift your weight to one leg and curl the other leg back toward your buttocks. Lower it back down with control, then switch sides.

The goal: 3 sets of 8-15 reps

Single-Leg Balance

Stand tall with feet shoulder-width apart. Shift your weight to one leg and lift the opposite knee to 90 degrees. Hold your balance, then switch sides. Rest 15-30 seconds after completion.

The goal: 3 sets of 15-60 second holds

Heel Touches

Balance on one leg and bend slightly at the knee and hip, lowering the opposite heel toward the floor in front of you. Tap lightly, then press back up through the standing leg. Switch sides and repeat.

The goal: 3 sets of 8-15 reps

Source: [bswhealth.com](https://www.bswhealth.com)



Cozy Roasted Vegetable Butternut Squash Lasagna

November calls for food that feels like a celebration of the season. Something warm, hearty and just a little indulgent. This roasted vegetable butternut squash lasagna brings all the cozy vibes, with layers of fall veggies, creamy squash sauce and melty cheese that make every bite taste like comfort at the table. It's the kind of dish you'll be grateful for when the days get shorter, the nights get colder and your appetite asks for a little extra love.

Ingredients

For the Roasted Veggies

- 1 red bell pepper, julienned or cut into chunks
- 1 yellow or orange bell pepper, julienned or cut into chunks
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 8 ounces baby bella mushrooms, sliced
- 2 medium zucchini, sliced and quartered
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- Freshly ground salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

For the Butternut Squash Layer

- 1 large butternut squash (at least 3 pounds)
- 2/3 cup milk (I like unsweetened almond milk, but any milk will work)
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar or coconut sugar (or pure maple syrup)
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper



Cozy Roasted Vegetable Butternut Squash Lasagna

For the Noodles

- 10 lasagna noodles
- For the ricotta mixture:
 - 1 egg
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt
 - 1 (15-ounce) container ricotta
 - Freshly ground black pepper

For the Layers

- 3 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, divided (approximately 12 ounces)
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese, divided

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Add all of the veggies for roasting to a large baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons of olive oil and sprinkle with garlic powder, salt and pepper. Use your hands to toss the veggies together, then spread them out in an even layer. Set aside while you prep your butternut squash.
3. Use a sharp knife to cut off both ends of a butternut squash; you'll cut about 1/4-1/2 inch off each end. Next, cut the butternut squash in half vertically. Place the butternut squash upright or vertically on a wooden cutting board that's very secured to your counter. We don't want the cutting board or squash to wobble as you cut it. Use your knife to cut the butternut squash vertically down the middle. Use a spoon to scoop out the seeds of the cut butternut squash. Place the butternut squash halves flesh side down on a separate medium baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
4. Place both veggies and squash in the oven on two different racks. Roast the veggies for 30 minutes or until they are slightly golden, then remove to cool down. The butternut squash will take slightly longer; about 1 hour total or until the squash is very fork-tender. Set aside to cool for a little bit before scooping out the flesh. Keep heat in the oven.



Cozy Roasted Vegetable Butternut Squash Lasagna

5. Make the butternut squash sauce: transfer the flesh of the butternut squash to a high-powered blender or the bowl of a food processor. Add in milk, brown or coconut sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, allspice and salt and pepper. Blend until smooth and set aside.
6. Do this step while the veggies and squash roast: Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Cook the lasagna noodles for 5-6 minutes, then drain. Immediately lay the noodles flat on an oiled baking sheet or cutting board so you can easily assemble the lasagna when ready. Another option is to soak the lasagna noodles in very warm (hot) water for 20-30 minutes if you do not want to boil them. (Note: you can also use no-cook lasagna noodles, but they aren't my favorite!)
7. In the small bowl, add the ricotta, egg, salt and pepper. Mix until well combined. Set aside.
8. To assemble the lasagna, spread 3/4 cup of butternut squash mixture over the bottom of a 9x13-inch baking dish. Place 5 of the cooked lasagna noodles on top, laying four vertically and one horizontally. Spread half of the ricotta cheese mixture on top of the noodles, followed by half of the roasted veggies, then top with 3/4 cup shredded mozzarella. Next, add 1 heaping cup of the butternut squash mixture on top of the mozzarella and then sprinkle with 1/4 cup of parmesan cheese.
9. Repeat layers once more: adding remaining noodles (four vertically and one horizontally), the rest of the ricotta cheese mixture, remaining roasted veggies, 3/4 cup shredded mozzarella, then top with any remaining butternut squash sauce and 1/4 cup parmesan cheese. Finally, top with the remaining 1 1/2 cups of shredded mozzarella cheese.
10. Cover with foil and bake for 25 minutes. Remove foil and bake another 15-20 minutes until cheese starts to brown just a bit. Garnish with extra parmesan and either chopped basil or parsley. Cool for 15-20 minutes before cutting and serving. Serves 12.

Source: ambitiouskitchen.com

NFP Corp. and its subsidiaries don't provide legal advice. Information provided herein is for general informational purposes. Please consult with your legal counsel before implementing any wellness strategy as a part of your overall employee benefit offering.



November Is Gratitude and Giving Back to the Community Month

Many people deal with stress every day. Work, family issues, health concerns and financial obligations are parts of everyday life that commonly contribute to heightened stress levels. Given that minimizing the chronic stress of daily life as much as possible can support your overall health, this month, focus on these evidence-based ways to relieve stress.

November 7 **Thankful Walks**

As the air turns crisp, try turning an ordinary walk into a gratitude walk. Each time your foot hits the ground, think of something you're thankful for. It can be big or small. By the end, you'll have collected a mental list of blessings that's longer than your stride.

November 14 **Gratitude Jar**

This week, start a virtual gratitude jar with family, friends or coworkers. Drop a note each day into a shared doc, group chat or even a sticky-note board. Reading them together at month's end (or on Thanksgiving) turns small reflections into a shared tradition.

November 21 **Lend a Hand, Lighten a Load**

The holiday to-do list can feel endless. Look for one simple way to help someone else. It could be running an errand, watching the kids for an hour or bringing coffee to a tired coworker. Giving lightens another's load and strengthens your own sense of purpose.

November 28 **Season of Small Joys**

As November winds down, celebrate the "in-between" moments. Savor your morning coffee, laugh at a silly meme, or enjoy the warmth of a cozy blanket. Gratitude isn't only for the big things; noticing small joys adds up to a happier, calmer season.



Send our Wise & Well Tips of the Week to your employees for quick, easily digestible health and wellbeing tidbits they can incorporate into their daily lives.

– Your Wise & Well Team

Source: clevelandclinic.org



November Is Gratitude and Giving Back to the Community Month

Why It Matters



Boosts happiness.



Lowers stress.



Strengthens relationships.



Improves sleep.

How to Practice

Write down three things you're thankful for each day.



Share appreciation with a coworker.



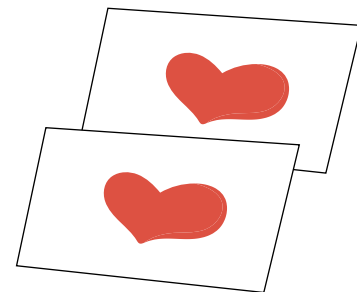
Take a gratitude walk.



Pause to savor small joys.



The Power of Gratitude



Reminder

Gratitude doesn't have to be grand. Small, consistent acts create lasting impact.

Source: [clevelandclinic.org](https://tinyurl.com/4m86jwnv)
<https://tinyurl.com/4m86jwnv>