

December 2014 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Helpful Suggestions and Tips to Reduce Holiday Stress

The holiday season has arrived. For many, events surrounding holidays create stress, wanted or unwanted; or what can be called eustress, which is positive, and distress, which is negative. Examples of good stress include physical activity, chatting with friends, and playing games. Examples of bad stress are fear, worry, and noise. How can one deal with this stress and maintain a quality of life throughout the season? Various tips and suggestions for doing so are available in many books and on-line. Following is a composite of several healthful and helpful hints from the Mayo Clinic Staff, from the book, *The How of Happiness*, and from University of Maryland psychology lecturer Dr. Thomas Capo.

Mayo Clinic Staff's Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>)

- **Acknowledge your feelings.** "If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief."
- **Reach out.** "If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships."
- **Be realistic.** "The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones."
- **Set aside differences.** "Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion."
- **Stick to a budget.** "Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts." (e.g., donate to a charity, give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.)
- **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list." Line up help for party prep and cleanup!
- **Learn to say no.** "Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed."
- **Don't abandon healthy habits.** "Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt."
- **Take a breather.** "Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do."
- **Seek professional help if you need it.** "Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional."

From *The How of Happiness*, doing the following can lead to holiday happiness:

- expressing appreciation (gratitude) of what one has; being optimistic; helping others by performing acts of kindness; staying connected with friends and family, especially during the holidays; use your stress coping skills when negative things happen; maintain your physical energy level because it does affect emotional and mental health; and savor life's joys by remembering that simple things bring rewards.

Capo's tips to reducing stress this holiday season: <http://www.reliableplant.com/Read/3418/reducing-stress-levels-holidays>

- Tip #1: simply relax and enjoy yourself and your family and friends.
- Tip #2: "set aside a little time each day to engage in some kind of stress-reducing activity. Anything that "calms us down" will do, whether it consists of reading, listening to music, yoga, meditation, or a hobby, etc."
- Tip #3: try to avoid overuse of alcohol and overeating. Drinking and eating too much can affect sleep which can affect weight gain which affect emotions.
- Tip #4: allow yourself time to go places and do things. Avoid being in a "big rush."
- Tip #5: plan ahead. Holidays happen at predictable times each year.
- Tip #6: "Stay connected, but not over-committed. The holidays are a great time to stay connected with family and friends...Many of us, however, add to our stress levels by over-committing ourselves (and our loved ones) to social events this time of year."

- Tip #7: avoid needing to rush to buy gifts and to overspending both cash and credit card; avoid getting caught up in a last minute buying frenzy. Plan ahead, weeks/months in buying gifts.
- Tip# 8: consider sending non-traditional gifts such as subscriptions to magazines.

“I think cookies are sort of the unsung sweet, you know? They're incredibly popular. But everybody thinks of cakes and pies and fancier desserts before they think cookies. A plate of cookies is a great way to end dinner and really nice to share at the holidays.” Bobby Flay: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/holidays.html#S1j3rkoMidY0cQE4.99>