

December 2018 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Tips for Enjoying the Holidays

Our feelings about holidays are very personal. We can feel happy, sad, or be ambivalent. Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays can create stress because we often overschedule or over anticipate the unknown. We are apt to overindulge, overspend, or overanticipate. Sometimes we spend too much time with family and other times too little or not enough. We have expectations of what we should do, especially when there is personal or family illness or multiple caregiving roles. Some people experience seasonal affective disorder or may have depression.

For enjoying the holidays as much as possible, here are several tips to help you put “enjoyment” in your daily activities:

- **Reflect on what is important to you during the holidays.** Determine ahead of time what will give meaning (e.g., who you would like to spend time with and how you would like to spend the time).
- **Make plans early about what you will do during the holidays.** Advance planning gives a sense of control and gives you something to look forward to. Plan one activity that is important to you.
- **Let others know how they can support you** and accept their offers of such things as shopping, cooking, wrapping, and chauffeuring. Communicate what it is you want or need. Be sure to acknowledge if those you ask to help have enough time to provide support.
- **Set a reasonable pace and acknowledge that you cannot do everything for everyone!** Holiday seasons are not sprint events that you “run” as fast as you can. Doing too much for too many people for too many events compromises your physical, mental, social, and emotional health.
- **Manage your spending.** Advertisements promote consumerism (Buy! Buy! Buy!). Decrease financial stress by making and sticking to a budget. Thoughtfulness does not come with a hefty price tag. Gift solutions could include giving to a charity in person’s name, making a home-cooked meal, reducing the number of gifts; or arranging for spending time having a cup of tea or coffee..
- **Manage your expectations for family gatherings.** Be flexible and be clear as to your expectations when multiple generations and multiple families celebrate together. Go without a fixed set of expectations. Focus on what you appreciate about the holidays. In other words, “go with the flow!”
- **Monitor use of alcohol and medications.** During holiday seasons it is easy to overindulge in alcohol. Moderation is the key. Review your medication instructions about interactions with alcohol and maintain your daily medication schedule. Missed doses can lead to emergency care.
- **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Practice relaxation techniques when feeling stress surging upon you. Continue to make those good food choices you have incorporated into your daily lifestyle. Stick to your usual daily routine and you will make it through the holidays and be snug in bed!
- **Think ahead about stories or observations from the past family gatherings that you’d like to share.** Telling stories about favorite family traditions/events bring back fond memories.
- **Finally,** reflect on what went well this holiday season and improvements you would like to make for the following year.

Happy Healthy Holidays to You All