



Managing Stress Holiday Stress

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It's that time again—the whirlwind of gift-giving, baking, and parties that come with the holiday season. While this is a time of joy and merriment for many of us, we may also feel overwhelmed by the extra effort needed to accomplish both our daily tasks and holiday demands. Let's take a look at stress and how to deal with stress over the holiday season.

Stress can have positive or negative effects on our lives. Negative stress shows itself through feelings of being overwhelmed, numb or sad. Negative stress also may show itself through our bodies via headaches, fatigue, tummy troubles or muscle tension. On the flip side, the energy generated by stress can be a powerful motivator to get things done.

Ways to minimize negative stress and motivate ourselves during the holidays include:

- **Take care of your body.** This means getting enough good nutrition, exercise and rest each day. It may be helpful to schedule a regular bed time each night, as well as plan your diet before each day. Add at least 30 minutes of exercise to your schedule each day.
- **Get Organized.** Plan a budget for gift-giving and for entertaining. Stick to that budget. Make lists to help you remember the details to plan great holiday events.
- **Create Shortcuts:** Do you really have to send cards to everyone you know this season? How about sending cards to only close family/friends this year? Does your holiday baking require 12 different recipes, or can you reduce your giving to one or two recipes this year? Decide which things you **MUST** do for the holidays and start your short-cuts from that point.
- **Coping with Too Much Family:** If you're hosting the holiday event, you have control over the guest list. It's okay to place limits on guests by not serving alcohol or limiting the time of the event. You may opt to forgo a big family dinner in favor of hosting a "drop-in" dessert party. If you have several relatives to visit, then schedule your time for each location in advance. No one's feelings will be seriously hurt; the important thing is getting to spend some time together during the holiday season.
- **Coping with Loneliness:** Try to stay in touch with long-distance family and friends via telephone or the Internet. Volunteer to help at a local charity on the holiday. You'll make new friends and feel good about helping others who may be lonely or in need during this season.

- **Honoring Old Traditions and Creating New Traditions:** As we grow, our families change over time. Family members may move away or die, while we may gain new family members through marriage and birth. As families change, so do traditions. Which rich traditions do you bring to the table each year? What new traditions can you create as circumstances change? One example may be changing the time for opening presents—families with adult children may opt for an afternoon time for presents, to allow young children to open presents at home in the morning. Or, create a “box party” for adult family members to gather and exchange presents on a day other than the holiday.

If your holiday stress has gotten to the point where you are unable to function in your daily activities, or have thoughts of self-harm, please seek professional help immediately. Winter Haven Hospital’s Center for Behavioral Health is a good place to seek this kind of confidential help. Their 24 hour number is **1-800-723-3248**.

With some creativity and good self-care, the holidays can be a time of minimal stress and focused on joyous giving and celebration.