



Holiday Stress Management

Quick Reference Guide

Ways to Avoid Stress

Any holiday - whether it's Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa - can throw off your routine. With the hustle and bustle of preparations, along with extra people in your home, we offer a few things you can do to avoid extra stress:

- When that inevitable of all traditions happens -- eating around the table with family, friends and even some people that you're not sure who they are -- you are at a heightened stress potential. It seems that most times you get seated beside someone you would prefer were no closer than 30 feet! Be proactive, and sit beside people you like. It might create a momentary shuffling of chairs and seating arrangements, but it will be well worth it.
- Don't go to any stores the week before the holidays. While everyone is running around shopping at the last minute, you can relax and listen to music, watch TV, read a book or do anything you enjoy!
- Buy yourself a couple of presents and sign them from you. It's great if the presents are something you can do with the whole family -- a board game, movie DVD, etc. That way you can look forward to getting some things you know you'll really enjoy!
- If you usually have turkey, chicken, fish, tofu, beans, lentils or eggs, eat loads of them. These foods are all high in tryptophan, which makes you happy.
- Focus on what's important -- family and friends.
- Always have an escape plan. When all else fails, have that place you absolutely must go, even if it's just the solitude of the bathroom for a few minutes!

The Stress Management Pillars

Nutrition

- No more than two cups of coffee (caffeine) a day.
- Avoid fast food when possible.
- Eat lots of fruit and vegetables.
- Avoid eating at your desk.
- Allow your body some time to digest food before getting to work again.
- Drink six to eight glasses of water a day.
- Avoid snacking on junk food (not like it's going to be laying around eh!).

- Read labels so you can avoid foods that are high in carbohydrates and fat.
- A glass of wine or a bottle of beer at the end of the day (when you get home) is fine, but don't overdo it.

Exercise

- Experts differ, but try to exercise for at least 20 minutes three times a week.
- Walking is a great form of exercise.
- If your day is really busy, set the alarm a half hour earlier and exercise when there are fewer things to distract you.
- Stretching is good exercise we can do anywhere.
- Walking at lunch hour rather than sitting at your desk can improve both health and efficiency.
- If your willpower is low, find a buddy.

Relationships

- Everybody needs a friend at work.
- Learn that it is OK to ask for help.
- Smile more often.
- Get to know your next-door neighbor.
- Offer to do something for someone else with no expectation of thanks or payment.
- Support is reciprocal. Support them and they support you.
- Don't whine. Nobody wants to be around a whiner.
- Have a positive relationship with yourself.
- Listen to what your inner voice is saying and make that voice positive.

Relaxation

- Remember to breathe.
- Deep breathing gets blood to our brain and rids our bodies of toxins.
- Music helps us relax. Lively music perks us up and slower music helps us slow down.
- Exercise is a form of relaxation.
- While a shower is invigorating, a long soak in a tub can be very relaxing.
- Learn how to give a massage and teach your partner how to give you a massage in return.
- Practice regularly.

Ways to Keep Yourself Flexible

- Learn how to talk to ourselves and pay attention to our inner voice.
- Make a commitment to experience a few things outside our comfort zone each day.
- Practice giving ourselves permission to let go of things: projects, people, opinions, etc.
- Try sitting at a different spot at the table occasionally, taking a different route to work, changing our hairstyle, or going somewhere different to experience different foods.

Managing Time

- Make a to-do list each day, without putting so many things on it that we are guaranteed to fail to complete everything.
- Prioritize your to-do list, with one being urgent items, two being important but not urgent, and three being not important or urgent.
- Recognize that not everything has to be done perfectly. Some things have to be done well. Other things just have to be done.
- Delegate tasks to others, both at work and at home.
- Learn to say "No" when others ask us to do things we have no time to do, don't want to do, or when we begin to feel taken advantage of.
- Buy a planner and begin scheduling things so you can say, "No" if your time is planned and someone wants you to do something else.
- Lower your standards to accept a less than perfect life.

Visualization

View images of peaceful settings to help you relax. Some examples include;

- A pristine beach with white sand and palm trees.
- A colorful sunset behind a mountain range.
- A calming waterfall trickling down rocks.
- A fluffy kitten taking a nap.
- Delicate flowers placed gently on greenery.
- Snow gently falling on Christmas morning.

Basic Stress Management Strategies

Alter

Sometimes this is the most promising strategy. Let's say you are always stressed when you are going to be late for a meeting. Change the situation by setting an alarm so you will leave five or 10 minutes earlier. Or, write the appointment down with a 15-minute cushion. For example, if you have a doctor's appointment at 2:30, write it in your planner for 2:15.

Avoid

On the other hand, that mouthy neighbor may be somebody you can avoid. You know cheese gives you a migraine, so you avoid it. You know that your spouse prefers to eat breakfast at 7 a.m. sharp, so you accommodate that preference. Forcing ourselves into situations that make us stressed, when we really don't have to be in those situations, is just being a masochist.

Accept

There are some things in life, like taxes, that are unavoidable, so we may as well accept these situations with good grace. Let's say going to the dentist makes you stressed. Accept that and deal with it accordingly. Play music before you go. Give yourself some positive self-talk like, "By this time tomorrow it will be all over," "I won't have to do this again for six months," or "I'll get through this."

The Cost of Stress

Remember that stress costs you in many ways.

- High blood pressure or headaches
- Risk of heart attack, stroke, or diabetes
- Always tired and/or angry
- Not feeling much of anything

