5 Ways to Handle Holiday Stress

What’s at Stake

Stress sets in when there is an increase in demand for our time and resources that we can’t meet. In small doses, stress can be powerful. It motivates us to do the things we need to do to survive. However, too much stress can have negative effects on our mental and physical health. And it can certainly ruin the holidays.

What’s the Danger

The holidays are a time for celebrating the things we care about and enjoying the warmth of the season with loved ones. Unfortunately, for many people the holidays are also a time of overwhelming stress.

Example

Some of the symptoms of too much stress include:

- Sleeping difficulties
- Feelings of anxiety and of being overwhelmed
- Being short-tempered and uptight
- Physical sensations such as tense muscles, headache or upset stomach
- Abuse of substances such as food, cigarettes, alcohol or drugs

How to Protect Yourself

Here are a few suggestions for reducing holiday stress:

1. Lower your expectations!

Close your eyes for a minute and imagine what the holidays are supposed to look like. Now be honest with yourself: Is your vision

even realistic or are you placing unreasonable demands on yourself and your family? Forget perfection. Outside of a Hollywood movie, there is rarely such thing as the perfect gift, the perfect family gathering or the perfect dinner. Give yourself a break and learn to go with the flow, accepting setbacks and missteps with a sense of humor.

2. Set priorities and focus on what's important.

Remember that many holiday activities—whether it's cleaning the house, shopping, going to parties—are just a means to an end. Ultimately, the purpose of the holidays is a simple one and that is to be with the ones you love. Before tackling another task, ask yourself how important the task is. Is it worth the energy? Will it help you achieve the goal?

3. Plan ahead

Don't leave things until the last minute. Shop, cook, pack and prepare ahead of time. You can also shop online or shop by phone. It's faster and a lot less stressful

4. Stick to a budget

The holidays are when some people go overboard with their spending. But overspending now just leads to more stress when the bills arrive next month. Set a budget for the holidays and stick to it. One way to reduce spending is to take advantage of free entertainment, such as driving around to look at holiday decorations. Another way is to give homemade gifts. If you have a large family, draw names so you don't have to buy so many gifts.

5. Take a break

Take 15 to 20 minutes every day to recharge. Take a walk or listen to soothing music. Or just close the door, turn off the phone, get into a comfortable position, close your eyes and breathe deeply several times. Do something to help you restore inner calm.

Final Word

Don’t let stress take over your holidays. Learn how to reduce stressful triggers, such as high expectations or excessive demands on your time and money. Keep it simple and take care of yourself. And keep your eye on the big picture: finding peace and joy with your loved ones during the holidays.