

# *HOLIDAY STRESS*



## *TIPS FOR MANAGING YOUR STRESS LEVELS SUCCESSFULLY*

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Every single person on the planet has experienced their own events that cause different types of stress. No one is immune to this intense feeling. But, when the holiday season pops up, so does the level of stress that many experience.

If you have felt any of the following, it's probably safe to say that you are already dealing with some form of stress:

***You are overly cranky***

***You find it difficult to get a good night's rest***

***You are on a weight roller-coaster***

***You find yourself more "on edge"***

***You feel as if the world is crashing down on top of you***

While many of these "symptoms" can be related to things other than stress, we will be addressing them here as if they are created by stress specifically and explain some things you can do to elevate some of it throughout the holiday gatherings, shopping sprees, and other unplanned surprises that are yet to come your way!

## **Stress-Reducing Tips To Help You Cope**

### **1) Stick to a Normal Schedule**

This is important to **ALL** family members, not just you. Everyone needs to have a regular routine, especially children. We thrive on it. And children **DEPEND** on it! Diverting from your normal, every day scheduled tasks can add unnecessary stress to you and your family. So try to keep up with your set schedules of eating, sleeping, TV time, and of course play times. With the emotional excitement of the holidays, friends and family members coming for unannounced visits, and a social "get together", it can be a bit more difficult to stick to your normal daily routines, but it isn't impossible if you have a solid support system (i.e. - a spouse, close family member, or valued friend that are willing to help you "stick with it").

Remember too that you can always make small adjustments to your normal routine to fit that day's schedule of "hectic" events, but it will make keeping to your schedule all the more difficult later on.

## **2) Express Your Feelings**

Let others know just how you are feeling by sharing it with them in a positive way. If things are bothering you, tell someone about it. But you should do it in a manner that doesn't put undue stress upon them! Having a family "chat session" about what they are feeling can not only strengthen the bonds between you, but also alleviate some of the normal stresses associated with the holidays. This, however, shouldn't be a "gripe session" though. Don't let your stressful feelings turn into anger that is outwardly expressed at the expense of a loved one's own feelings. There are more productive ways to channel your energetic feelings without being hurtful. Discussing what you are feeling instead of who you are feeling this towards can certainly help relieve stress and figure out constructive ways that each of you can work together to solve any tensions or problems. Don't expect immediate results though. Things take time. But taking positive steps towards understanding through sharing your feelings is the right direction to head.

## **3) Ask For Help**

It's not as devastating as you might think. If you are having a tough time shouldering all the responsibilities that are upon you, just ask someone to help you with them. You could do this by dividing up different tasks that are on your holiday list of things to get done. Of course you'll want to be sure that whatever task you assign to a family member is "age appropriate". Meaning you don't want to give your 10 year old the job of hanging outdoor lights on the roof! So make sure that you delegate these responsibilities as they fit the laborer. If your particular need for help is more of an emotional nature, speak with someone you trust about what you are feeling. Remember, if you are still harboring ill feelings towards Aunt Fanny from 3 years ago, do your best not to bring up any names and just discuss what it is that is bothering you about that particular situation. Otherwise you could just make yourself feel even worse by piling on unnecessary guilt. If you find that you can't discuss these matters with a family member, take time and visit your family doctor. He/She may be able to offer you an outsider's view of what's going on, which can be quite helpful in looking at the situation in a different way. If the stressful feelings are causing a more serious problem, your doctor can help.

#### 4) Know Your Limits and Abide By Them

You should never "bite off more than you can chew". This applies to not only what you can get done during the holidays, but also what you can afford to spend. Don't over-extend yourself or your finances. Remember, the thing that people will remember most is that you were there with them, spending precious time to celebrate the joy of being together and not the physical gifts they received. YOU are worth more than a little "trinket". And that is what will create lasting memories for everyone! And, don't be too harsh on yourself for not getting that expensive video game for Johnny or that collectible doll for Jane. Do what you can and nothing more. Don't place high expectations on yourself, and don't make promises you simply cannot keep. Limiting what you can realistically achieve will help reduce the stresses you put on yourself.

#### 5) Don't Strive For "Perfection"

Nobody's perfect. And nothing can BE perfect, so don't expect that! Do what you can and be happy knowing that you did all you could to make it a wonderful holiday. Trying to create a "picture perfect" holiday gathering can really "sock it to you" in the stress department. Worrying about what you CANNOT do could lead to very problematic health issues. And you DON'T want that! The worst part of this is that it can all be avoided by thinking realistically about what CAN be done and not what you feel *NEEDS* to be accomplished.

There is a significant difference between those two. Make a promise to yourself that you will only do what you can without placing too much pressure on yourself to get it all done. A good thing to keep in mind is that **YOU HAVE NO CONTROL OVER ANYONE OTHER THAN YOURSELF**. They will do what they do and that's the end of it! If you believe in your heart that you can in essence "teach an old dog, new tricks", that is, to try and get a person that is set in their "ways" to behave differently for even 15 minutes, you are headed for heartache. Try not to let the actions of others within your circle of family or friends discourage you from having a great holiday season. People will be who they are and you should learn to let go of any personal expectations of how **YOU** want the holiday gatherings to be. It won't do anything but add to your own stress levels.

## 6) Remember What Makes the Holiday Season Special for You and Maintain Focus

Always keep this thought in the back of your mind: "**The Holidays are A Time of SHARING and TOGETHERNESS**". Understand that this sentence may have a different meaning for each family member or friend depending on events that have occurred in holidays past. The most common reason for this stress inducer is thinking and remembrance. If something pleasant has occurred for someone, that's what they will tend to remember about the holiday seasons. If the person has experienced an incredible loss, then more than likely they will not be in a very celebratory mood. And you shouldn't expect them to be. Take some time to think about what that person might be feeling before you try and bombard them with "good tidings". But, don't let this discourage you of having a happy holiday though. If you have wonderful memories of togetherness, then bring those memories forward in a way that makes you comfortable without putting others out. Never force your happiness onto someone that has suffered a devastating loss. Allowing each individual to have their own version of how they celebrate, or not celebrate, the holidays can really reduce your stress levels.

## 7) Do Some Realistic Planning

Never underestimate the value of a good plan! But, your plan needs to be one that is within your ability to complete. You should never set too many goals for yourself that you couldn't possibly get done in the course of two weeks. That is, if you're pressed for time, as many of us are. Every year, many people wait until the very last minute to get everything done all at once. This is not a good idea. What happens? You know you have a big shopping list to take care of, so you dash out the door quick as you can, get into the car, speed off into the night to get it all finished up before the stores close. Guess what? There are probably a hundred other folks doing the exact same thing you are at that very moment! Now, not only do you have to deal with trying to get those things on your shopping list, you're going to have to make your way through filled lanes of traffic, crowded stores, and lengthy check out waits. But, what if you spend all that time searching for a highly sought after item once you get to a specific shop, only to find that they are completely out of stock! Now you have to go try your luck at another location, or a completely different store altogether. You **CAN** avoid all this stress by creating a plan.

Even if you only have 1 month left to finish your shopping, you could take an extra hour out of each day to pick up those items on your list before the mad holiday buying rush.

The best way to have a good, "less stress" holiday plan is to start one right after the holidays are over! You can get great bargains through "after holiday" sales and take those items, cross them off your list, and put them up for safe-keeping until next year's holiday. Plus, there's **NO RUSH** to complete the tasks on your "to do" list since you have an entire year to get them done!

## 8) Take A Break!

With everything that's going on during the holiday season, it's important to make some time for yourself to relax. Whether it's stopping at the corner Cafe for a coffee, treating yourself to a non-holiday themed movie, or setting down to a peaceful bite to eat, doing just one small thing to take yourself away from the stresses of the holiday season can be a very helpful mental sigh of relief! In fact, using some very basic relaxation breathing techniques will aid you in releasing stress.

Stop whatever it is you're doing, close your eyes, and take in a few deep, cleansing, breaths. You will find this to be very soothing in times of high stress. As the body takes in more oxygen, it reduces the amount of stress hormonal releases within the body. This reduces the physical feelings of stress. If you have time in your busy day, go home and take a short, restful nap. This can help to "recharge" your mental batteries. You could even end your day with a sweet-smelling, muscle relaxing, steamy bath. Light some candles, shut and lock out the world, and retreat to the most private room in your home! Don't have time for a bath? Then, how about a nice, hot, cup of chamomile tea? Use whatever common stress-busters work best for you. Just make sure you set aside some time to DO them over the course of the holidays.

## 9) Be Budget Conscious

A very common occurrence with many people during the holidays is the problem of **overspending**. Of course everyone wants to make those they care for as happy as possible by getting them their every whim. But this just isn't realistic. Especially with the rising costs that surround our life. If you haven't set a clear-cut budget for your holiday spending, **DO IT!** Not only that, but you **MUST STICK WITH IT.** Spending more than what you have is easy to do. And those that have an extensive line of credit, it becomes even easier to go over budget. An important fact to keep in your mind is that just because the money is available to you doesn't mean you HAVE to spend it. Even Santa makes a list and checks it twice.

You should do the same. If you have a big list of gifts that must be bought, why not try using the good old "hat trick"! Write down each persons name on a small scrap of paper and put it inside a hat. Have each family member then select one of the paper scraps. This will be the person they must buy a gift for. That will in turn spread about the shopping responsibility throughout the family and reduce the amount of stress on you.

## 10) Don't Be Afraid To Say No

It's hard to tell someone you care about this word isn't it? And that's completely understandable. No one wants to look into the hopeful eyes of a loved one and say this word or to be looked upon as the "bad guy". You may feel as if you are letting them down, or making them unhappy by saying no. But at times, you **MUST**. Otherwise you could create more stress for yourself either by having an added responsibility to provide that person with whatever it is they asked of you, or by trying to attain it and being unsuccessful. Either way, simply using this one word can save yourself tons of unwanted stress during the holiday season.

## 11) Practice "Giving"

The TRUE spirit of the holiday season can only be experienced through the gift of giving. That doesn't mean to run out and grab some last minute charity presents for the local homeless shelter (although that is an awfully nice thing to do). What I'm referring to here is to donate some **TIME** to helping a local charity. Many times this precious gift is more important than that of a monetary hand. However, if all you can offer is a donation of gifts or money, then give it! You will be surprised at how fantastic you feel inside after doing so.

Now, if you absolutely cannot do any of those things, why not help a neighbor? I'm sure Mr. Smith next door would appreciate an extra hand in getting those lights set up! After shopping, don't just smile and wish a happy holiday to that "bell-ringer" standing outside in the cold hoping for a few pennies to help their organization. Give them your change from your purchase you just made inside. If you already do this, keep doing it! You know firsthand how quickly it brings a joyous smile to your face from the inside out. And be sure to get your children involved if you have them. Instilling the spirit of giving will carry something special within them for a lifetime.

## **12) Take Your Time**

More often than not, people are ALWAYS in a rush. Having an internal time clock can cause you excessive amounts of stress. But, why are you rushing yourself?! It will still take you the same amount of time to get whatever you need to get done, well, done! So, **SLOW DOWN**. Enjoy your time outside. So there's a heap of traffic? So what! If you don't like all the traffic, then try and structure your schedule around a time when there's less of it. Take a weekday off from work and do some of your more important shopping in the morning. You'll get done faster, and you'll have more time to relax in the evening before you head back to work the next day. If it's literally impossible for you to do that, then try shopping later. Sure, you might miss out on a couple hours of extra sleep, but you'll have that much more accomplished and can make up for the lost sleep on the weekend. Plus, when too many people are rushing, accidents usually happen. So it's important to slow yourself down and take more time to get things done. And that means making more time available for such tasks.

## **13) Get or Do Something Just for YOU**

To reduce even more stress, try picking up a little something for yourself. Or treat yourself to a relaxing manicure, facial, or massage. This can do wonders for reducing your holiday stress levels. Those aren't the only things you can do though. Take a walk in the park, drive the long route home after a busy day of shopping or working, or treat yourself to an ice cream! This should be something you can do with yourself and by yourself.

## **14) Use Those "Time-Savers" Along the Way**

Paper plates, disposable silverware, plastic cups, one-use aluminum baking pans, and napkins can really cut down on your workload when throwing a friendly get-together. No one likes cleaning up after a party, especially the person that has to do most of the work! Using things that can be thrown out after everything is all over can significantly reduce your stress. Did you remember to get trash bags? Cleaning up after a party isn't the ONLY thing that caters to saving you time though. Still have a few extra weeks before presents need to be wrapped up? Try purchasing a few things from home online! Many internet shops even include gift wrapping before the package is sent out for a small fee. So why not give it a try? This is especially handy for those that have friends or family across the country, or world for that matter.

## **15) Say "Thank You"**

Everyone enjoys receiving the gift of a well deserved "thank you", so always mind your manners and give them out freely! Also, folks like to know that you truly appreciated the time and effort it took them to select your gift, so take some time and send them a lovely 'Thank You' card, including a personal comment and not just your signature. This is a project the whole family can get behind. Divide up the work. Assign one person to putting the cards, or notes, into an envelope. Another can put on the stamps, and yet another can address them. Or, send them a "home-made" gift as your own unique way of saying thanks!

## **16) Leave Yourself Extra Time for the Unexpected**

Delays are a part of everyday living, but seem to heighten around the holiday hustle and bustle. There are lots of people traveling, shopping, and partaking in festive activities, so be sure you give yourself enough time to account for these delays in getting where you're going. In addition to this, winter weather can be, more often than not, unpredictable, which can also lead to back-ups in street traffic, delayed or even canceled flights, and other scheduled transportation systems. Psych yourself up for this ahead of time so that you might handle the stress a little better. Something else you could do as far as getting to important appointments on time is to set your clocks a half hour faster. Fool yourself into thinking that it is really later than it is. Then you'll be happily surprised when you end up at your destination on time, or even early!

There are practically dozens and dozens of ways to fight holiday stress. Talking to your family physician can put you onto the right pathway to battling many of them. Specifically if nothing you have tried thus far is working for you.

Having a wonderful, enjoyable, less stressful holiday season can be done by using the tips suggested here, or by those steps recommended by your family doctor. In any case, I hope that you have the best, most memorable holiday season ever, however you celebrate it, and with whomever you celebrate it with!

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Best Wishes  
For the  
Holiday Season

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