

Tips for reducing your holiday season stress

By Karla Maslowski

You don't have to serve Thanksgiving dinner with every traditional side dish ever created; you don't have to make a turkey. Gift giving doesn't have to mean expensive presents.

Our holiday season brings many expectations for how things should be. Sometimes we expect too much of ourselves or think that others are wanting more than we are able to give. This can create stress for the holidays.

The American Psychological Association interviewed adults and found that 38% of people say their stress increases during the holidays, which can lead to physical illness, depression, anxiety and substance misuse. The reasons given for stress were the lack of time, financial pressure, gift giving and family gatherings.

So how do we deal with holiday stress? People deal with stress in different ways and no one way is correct. You can use different stress-relief strategies to find what works for you. Here are some ideas to try:

- Plan ahead. Make a list and prioritize it. Determine what must be done and what can be declined. Start in November. Make or bake your favorite treats for the holidays and freeze them so they are available anytime during the holidays when you need quick treats.
- Plan your buying budget. Shop on sale or clearance. Give thought to gifts. Buy earlier and throughout the year. This will help ease the burden on your budget closer to the holidays.
- Continue to eat healthy. Limit intake of sugary foods and eat fresh fruit and vegetables throughout the season.
- Keep doing your workouts, even for a short time each day.
- Share feelings. When you feel overwhelmed or stressed, tell someone. Holidays can be stressful for everyone. Knowing that others can feel this way is helpful.
- Respect differences. Accept that there is more than one way to do something. Everyone does not have your same viewpoint and that is OK. Celebrate the uniqueness that makes everyone special.
- Be realistic. Set expectations that are obtainable. A party or holiday project doesn't have to be perfect. Life isn't perfect.
- Accept help. You don't have to do everything all by yourself. When you are feeling stressed, be straight forward and ask for help. You are only one person and can only do so much. Friends and family members may enjoy be part of the planning, doing and cleanup.

Most of all, enjoy your holiday season. Keep things simple, remembering to:

- Focus on what you can control.

- Create new traditions that are fun and meaningful to you.
- Make time for yourself and BREATHE.

As author and entrepreneur Ziad K. Abdelnour has said: “There’s no need to be perfect to inspire others. Let people get inspired by how you deal with your imperfections.”

Happy Thanksgiving, Hannukah, Christmas and New Year’s Day. May your holidays be everything you wish them to be. If not, may you be able to look upon them with satisfaction, joy and less stress.

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