

SPECIAL EDITION! –

MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS

The holidays can be a joyful time, offering a chance to connect with family and friends and share traditions. But for many people, it's a time of loneliness – some people live far from family and miss seeing their loved ones at this time of the year; others dread going to holiday parties without a partner and choose to stay home... alone. The holidays can be particularly stressful following a divorce or death of a loved one. If you're experiencing these feelings, understanding holiday stress is the best way to begin to deal with it.



WHAT CAUSES HOLIDAY STRESS?

Doing too much: “All things in moderation”, the saying goes...Too many activities, even if they're usually fun activities, can culminate in too much stress, leaving us feeling frazzled rather than fulfilled.

Eating, drinking and spending too much: too many parties, too much gift-giving, and indulging in rich foods or alcohol to excess can add to many peoples' stress of dealing with consequences (debt, weight gain, embarrassing behavior) that linger long after the season is over.

Too much togetherness: while gatherings can be fun, even close-knit families and friends can “overdose” on togetherness, making it hard to maintain a balance between healthy bonding and alone time. Sometimes, falling into old “roles” (“gossipy Aunt Gertrude” or “the baby of the family”) can bring more dread than love to these gatherings.

Not enough togetherness: Loneliness can be just as much a problem – as the world around you seems to be gathering with loved ones, those who rely on absent friends for support may feel deserted. These feelings are particularly pronounced for those whose family or circle of friends has been fractured by recent death or divorce.

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD): a sometimes unrecognized problem that comes with the holiday season is actually a byproduct of diminished daylight and weather that causes us to spend more time indoors; this subtle but very real type of depression may cast a cloud over this otherwise happy time.

*“I am with you always, to the end of time....”
 Matt. 28:20*

TIPS FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

Understand that you're not alone... Knowing that the holidays can be a lonely or sad time for many people may help you to feel less alone. Many people wish they could be with family or friends, but cannot; many people long for closer connections with those nearby, and find themselves feeling isolated, even in a room full of people. Gathering with others and talking to those who may share your feelings can help you feel less alone in your situation.

Be good to yourself: while it won't completely erase the feeling of loneliness, take time to do things that lift your spirits and build your self esteem. This includes getting plenty of rest, **eating well**, exercising, limiting alcohol, letting go of things you cannot change, and learning to say “no” to negative thoughts.

Stress-reducing Foods

These foods can increase serotonin (calming brain chemical), decrease adrenalin and cortisol, lower blood pressure, strengthen your immune system and make you more resilient to stress!

Complex carbohydrates (whole grain breads and cereals) **Avocados**
Oranges **Spinach** **Fatty Fish** (salmon, tuna) **Black tea** (not coffee!)
Pistachios **Almonds** **Milk** (low fat, skim) **Raw veggies** **Soybeans**

Rethink your expectations: recognize that our society has high expectations for this time of the year. When we realize that few (if any) people's lives truly measure up to these standards, we can shift our focus to all the great things we do have in life, and recognizing our blessings is the first step to sharing them – give thanks, and look for opportunities to do volunteer work!

Get connected: while it is possible to feel alone when surrounded by people, it's harder to feel lonely when you're reaching out to them – even something as simple as saying “hello” to neighbors or coworkers whom we often rush by, or picking up the phone and calling a friend to whom you haven't spoken in a while will strengthen bonds and help us all feel more “connected”.

Give to others: one excellent way to feel less stressed is to help those who are less fortunate– you'll be part of something much larger than yourself, immersing yourself in the true spirit of the holiday. Visiting a “shut-in” person will reward you as much as the recipient of your visit. Donating time to a cause you believe in will also bring you into contact with other people who share your values and interests – consider activities at your place of worship.

Examine your priorities: try not to put pressure on yourself (or others) to create the perfect holiday. Instead, focus on the meaning of the holiday – create new traditions if the ones that have made past holidays special cannot be recreated due to the absence of loved ones.

Get support if you need it: holidays can trigger real depression – especially if you're dealing with the death of a loved one or the breakup of a relationship. Don't be embarrassed to ask for help, or figure you'll get over “the blues” on your own... most people with depression need treatment to feel better – talk with your doctor about counseling and medication if this is the case.

For more information, go to
www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management
<http://griefandrenewal.com/article25/htm>
<http://divorcesource.com/CT/articles/wetstone1.html>

PERMISSION GRANTED TO REPRINT!