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Tips To Manage Holiday Stress

By Liz Ashe

Holidays for some people create a lot of stress. With an increase demand on their time, these people try to do too much and want everything to be perfect. Becoming aware of the positive and negative parts of the season can help you plan strategies in advance. Remember, while you may not recognize it during the busy times, holiday stress can affect you before, during and after the festivities are over. Consider some of these tips.

- ★ Plan the kind of holiday you want - it isn't necessary to do things the way you think others want you to do them. Establish your own traditions.
- ★ Remember that the best of plans can go haywire. Events will not always run smoothly and we set ourselves up for disappointment if we expect everything to be perfect....someone always spills the gravy on the best linen and children get cranky and misbehave....not everyone gets what they wanted for gifts.
- ★ Be careful not to establish unrealistic expectations for yourself or others. Recognize your limitations. Don't overextend yourself. Learn to say "NO." Don't commit to more activities than your schedule permits.
- ★ Alcohol, caffeine and sugar can make you more tense and uncomfortable. Go easy.
- ★ Pace yourself. Don't leave everything until the last minute. Planning ahead can help you avoid feeling over-whelmed. Set one or two specific goals every day. Ask for help from others in the family. Divide tasks like decorating, cooking, wrapping, and cleaning.
- ★ Remember: the holiday is just another day. It isn't likely to be perfect. And holidays are temporary.
- ★ Exercise, exercise, exercise. Research indicates that exercise stimulates the production of endorphins, mood-elevating chemicals produced by the body and it can help keep the weight down when we sample all those goodies.
- ★ Make a budget for gifts and stick to it. Gift exchanges don't have to be costly. The only limit is your imagination. Be creative. Write someone a poem, give coupons donating your time or services, cook a special treat, write an "I am glad you are in my life letter," or get the family involved making something.
- ★ Few people have ideal families and bringing everyone together can bring up old hurts or disappointments. Try to look past that and find positives on which to concentrate.
- ★ Be realistic about your finances. If your economic situation is limited, don't get caught up in commercialism and spend beyond your limit. You will have less stress when the bills come in. If children ask for gifts that are not in line with the budget this year, convey that information to them. Kids need to understand that there are financial limits.

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- ★ Visit with and enjoy people whose company you enjoy and limit your time with people who make you unhappy or depressed.
- ★ Invite someone who may be alone or who can't be with their family to join your holiday celebration.
- ★ Take time to think about your values and plan ways to give each other more time, thanks, praise, love and appreciation. It's a great way to re-clarify your own values and teach children values that can't be bought at a toy store!
- ★ If you are divorced or separated, don't allow your children to be caught in the middle of any struggles or ill feelings.
- ★ Devote time and energy to those activities and tasks that are meaningful to you and your family, and let go of others that aren't as important.
- ★ If you anticipate being alone during the holidays, plan in advance. Schedule a vacation away from home or get involved in a community activity to help others in need or visit shut-ins. Invite friends to share pre-holiday celebrations with you in your home.
- ★ There may be people absent from your holiday celebrations through death, divorce, or distance. Remember that holidays magnify feelings, particularly if we've experienced the death of a family member. We want traditions to be the same but suddenly we are confronted with the "empty chair." We visualize past holidays and remember all the happy times when everyone was together. It may help to sit quietly and remember them. Give thanks for the wonderful years you did share and to remember the fun you had. Don't try to deny your feelings.
- ★ Remind yourself of the spiritual meaning of the holidays and encourage others in your life to do the same.
- ★ Don't expect everyone to be happy and full of cheer throughout the holiday season (including yourself). It is not easy to be happy all the time and holidays are no exception. Don't put your emotions on hold. If your feelings are over-whelming, find someone to talk to.
- ★ One big stressor for married couples is deciding how to spend time with both families. Plan ahead and compromise. If you must juggle holiday activities, do your best to be fair to everyone, including yourself and your family. Some families rotate Thanksgiving and the Christmas/ Hanukkah/ Kwanzaa season. It may be impossible to please everyone.
- ★ Some family and social obligations aren't pleasant. When you have to visit people you are not excited about visiting, decide beforehand how much time you will spend with them. These visits need not dominate your entire holiday season. Limit time with people who make you unhappy or depressed.
- ★ Play, laugh, and enjoy as much as you can.
- ★ Try to shop throughout the year, especially during sales, and stash the gifts away. Take advantage of after holiday sales to stock up on paper goods, decorations, cards etc, for next year.
- ★ Give thanks for all you have and try to express your love for others in more direct ways than gifts, and remember the people who truly need your gift of time.
- ★ Take care of yourself physically. Get plenty of rest.

**All of us at Affiliated EAP
wish you and yours a
Happy Holiday Season**

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