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Preventing Stress for the Holidays

By Nicole Bonomi CPT

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests: stress and depression. The holidays present a dizzying array of demands such as parties, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few. With some practical tips, you can minimize the stress that accompanies the holiday season to help you enjoy this time of year.

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place with these helpful tips.

Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy.

Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out support. They can offer companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

Be realistic, forget perfection. Stop obsessing over doing it all. The world is not going to end if the house is a little cluttered or dinner is on the table a few minutes late. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.

Set aside differences. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry.

Stick to a budget. Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.

Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. Attempt to prevent last-minute scrambling.

Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity.

Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.

Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do.

Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Spend time outside. It stimulates the production of feel-good serotonin and also helps relieve [Seasonal Affective Disorder \(SAD\)](#). To ease SAD symptoms, spend time outdoors or near a window on sunny days, or ask your doctor about phototherapy (a treatment using a box that emits full-spectrum light).

Take a walk. The rhythm and repetition of walking has a tranquilizing effect on your brain, and it decreases anxiety and improves sleep.

Laugh. Laughing like crazy reduces stress hormones which, in turn, help immune cells function better.

Go tech-free. Constant cell phone buzzes and email alerts keep us in a perpetual fight-or-flight mode due to bursts of adrenaline. Not only is this exhausting, but it contributes to mounting stress levels, especially in women. What better time to turn your gadgets off than during a holiday get-together? Enjoy spending time with your family and friends without worry.

Fit in exercise. It may be the last thing you feel like doing when you're stressed out, but going for a run or hitting the gym can actually make you feel better. Workouts can boost your mood for up to 12 hours.

Think positive. The holidays may drive you to your breaking point, but don't focus on the bad. Negative thinking can trigger your body's stress response, just as a real threat does. Remember, it's time to celebrate with your family and friends (even if they do stress you out!). An optimistic outlook will help you cope with challenges that come your way.

Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

Sources:

www.Mayoclinic.com, Stress.about.com,
happiness-project.com
Overwhelmed? Contact EAP Compsych -
Guidanceresources.com

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FROM THE HEALTHY COOKBOOK

MAPLE- PECAN SWEET POTATOES

Bill and Cheryl Jamison, *Cooking Light*
November, 2009.

Yield: 8 Servings



Ingredients:

2 3/4 pounds sweet potatoes
1/4 cup of half-and-half
3 Tablespoons of melted butter
3 Tablespoons of maple syrup
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground allspice
1 large egg, lightly beaten
Cooking spray
1/2 cup mini-marshmallows
2 Tablespoons chopped pecans

Preparation:

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
2. Pierce potatoes several times with a fork; place on a foil-lined baking sheet. Bake at 400° for 1 hour or until tender. Cool slightly; peel and mash in a large bowl.
3. Reduce oven temperature to 350°.
4. Stir half-and-half and the next 8 ingredients (through egg) into sweet potatoes. Spoon mixture into a 2-quart baking dish coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes. Sprinkle the top with mini-marshmallows and chopped pecans; bake 12 minutes or until the mini-marshmallows are slightly melted. Serve immediately.

Nutritional Information:

Calories: 185
Fat: 7.3 g
Saturated Fat: 3.6 g
Carbohydrate: 28 g
Fiber: 3.4 g
Protein: 3.2g

