How Can You Reduce Holiday Stress?

Holiday stress is very real. However, there are ways in which we can prepare ourselves and hopefully deflect some of the increased stress of the holidays, which can lead to physical illness, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

It’s important to realize that we really do have more control than we think we do. However, it’s equally important to realize that even if we put these ideas into practice and continue to feel overwhelmed or depressed, professional help is available.

Conditions such as anxiety and depression can be managed with treatment. If symptoms such as sleeplessness, decreased appetite, depressed mood, decreased interests, and isolation continue for more than a week, please talk to your loved ones or your primary care physician.

Fatigue
We all overdo it. We know the importance of a balanced diet, moderate exercise, and plenty of sleep, but because there are so many distractions and stressors this time of year, we lose sight of some of the basic necessities. We need to take care of ourselves and pay increased attention to ensuring that we fulfill these areas of our lives as we get closer to the holidays.

Unrealistic Expectations
We all have our own personal history with holidays. We dream about the ways the holidays are supposed to be, and that can be a dangerous perspective to have. We get caught up in wanting to do it all. Sometimes setting more realistic expectations and making sure we communicate those expectations to our families and loved ones early in the holiday season—so we know what to expect—can help.

It’s also important to prioritize the most important activities. This includes knowing what’s important to you and where you want to put your energy. Maybe if your kids’ school parties are most important, you can put less time into hosting Thanksgiving or Christmas Eve. It’s important to look at quality, not quantity.

Over-Commercialization
It’s easy to get caught up in the commercialization and the marketing of the holidays. Advertisers will take advantage of our susceptibility, but we have the ability to put it in perspective and remind ourselves that we are the ones creating that anxiety, and we are the ones who can reduce it. To counter this, help a neighbor, a friend, a family member, or a stranger. It’s the act of giving that is more important than the gift.

Financial Stress
Giving to others is not about spending money, and of course, what goes along with setting realistic expectations is to maintain a budget and be transparent. It’s important to not overspend and keep in mind that “less is more.” It’s an old adage, but sometimes the personal gifts are the best ones—like tickets to a show, or even a poem, short story, or framed photo. It’s the act of giving that makes it meaningful.

Source: The Huffington Post
Educational Corner: Heart Attacks More Likely in Cold Weather

Heart attacks occur more often when temperatures plummet, a new study suggests.

Based on more than a decade and a half of medical and weather data, researchers linked an increased incidence of heart attacks to lower air temperatures, lower atmospheric pressure, higher wind velocity and shorter durations of sunshine, according to the report in JAMA Cardiology.

While lower air temperature, lower atmospheric air pressure, higher wind velocity and shorter sunshine duration all were associated with statistically meaningful increased risk of heart attack, the most pronounced effect was from temperature.

The researchers found a higher incidence of heart attack on days with air temperatures below freezing. The rates of heart attack declined when temperatures rose to more than 3 to 4 degrees Celsius, or 37.4 to 39.2 degrees Fahrenheit.

“So the worst thing you can do is go out in subzero temperatures, shovel snow, and then come in and drink coffee to warm up,” Jhalani said. “That can be the perfect storm.”

The best strategy to minimize the increased risk brought on by cold weather is to “dress appropriately,” Jhalani said in an email. “If you are at high risk (of a heart attack), you may want to avoid going out in really cold, windy weather. Or maybe move to a warmer climate.”

Source: Linda Carroll w/ Reuters Health

Healthy Cooking: Gingerbread Loaf

Ingredients:
- 1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 cup coconut oil, melted and cooled
- 1/4 cup maple syrup
- 1/4 cup molasses
- 1 egg, at room temperature
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 3/4 cup almond milk (or milk of choice)
Optional: coarse sugar to sprinkle on top

Directions:
1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line an 8x4 loaf pan with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and salt.
3. In a separate bowl, add coconut oil, maple syrup, molasses, egg, vanilla, and milk. Whisk until smooth. Add in the dry ingredients, and mix until everything is combined.
4. Pour the batter into the loaf pan, and sprinkle with a bit of coarse sugar. Bake loaf for 35-45 minutes or until a tester comes out clean. Let cool in pan for 10-15 minutes before allowing to cool completely on a wire rack.
5. To finish, you can drizzle the top with some melted white chocolate and add some dried cranberries and/or pistachios. Enjoy!
Get the Scoop on Added Sugars

The effects of eating sugar are anything but sweet. Too much sugar can lead to cravings, mood swings, weight gain, and tooth decay. So how much sugar is the right amount?

The American Heart Association recommends limiting added sugars in your diet. Most women should consume no more than 100 calories of added sugars, or about six teaspoons a day. Most men should limit added sugars to 150 calories, or 9 teaspoons.

Added sugars are syrups and sugars that are added to foods when they are processed or prepared. Cookies, cakes, and candy are loaded with added sugars. But you’ll also find it hiding in products you don’t always think of as sweet. Added sugars may be in ketchup, salad dressing, salsa, canned vegetables, granola bars, and processed foods.

Check the amount of added sugars on nutrition labels for most packaged foods. Also check the ingredient list for added sugars. Limit or avoid products with these names near the top of the ingredient list:

- Brown Sugar
- Corn Sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Dextrose
- Fructose
- Glucose
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Invert sugar
- Lactose
- Malt syrup
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- Sucrose
- Syrup
- Table sugar

Use These Wellness Tips to Power Through the Holidays!

**Know the signs.** You are most contagious in the first 24 hours when your symptoms are at their worst. If you have two or more of these symptoms, stay home to rest: fever over 101° F, cough, sore throat, running nose, headache, body aches, chills, or fatigue.

**Avoid germs at work.** Watch out for these germ-ridden places at the office: the sink in the break room, the office microwave, and doorknobs. Keep antiseptic wipes with you and remember to wash your hands frequently.

**Say no to stress.** Stress can influence the symptoms of cold, cough and flu by interfering with how the immune system functions. To keep your immune system strong, make sure to get plenty of rest and sleep all the time, not just when you’re sick.

**Sleep on a schedule.** Go to bed and wake up on a regular schedule. Plus, avoid stimulating beverages like caffeinated coffee or alcohol before going to sleep, as well as bright light from the screens on your phone, TV or other electronic devices.

**Try tea.** Drinking an herbal tea such as chamomile, passionflower or other soothing teas before bed can help you relax while also getting helpful fluids into your system.

**Take a multi-symptom medication.** Patients want fast, effective relief to help them get back to their busy lives. Look for a medication that can treat the toughest symptoms while also helping you rest. DayQuil Severe and NyQuil Severe fight your worst cold & flu symptoms so you can power through symptoms during the day, and get the rest you need at night to get back to being you.

Source: Women’s Health
There are two types of sugars in American diets: naturally occurring sugars and added sugars. Naturally occurring sugars are found naturally in foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose). Added sugars include any sugars or caloric sweeteners that are added to foods or beverages. Some examples of added sugars are white sugar, brown sugar, honey, and high fructose corn syrup.

In the American diet, soft drinks, candy, cakes, cookies, pies, fruit drinks (that are not 100% juice), and ice cream are some of the major sources of added sugar. Sugar is also added to many processed foods like ketchup, crackers, bread, soups, cereals, peanut butter, cured meats and salad dressing. Start reading labels to find out how much sugar is in the foods you eat.

The United States is the leading country in average daily sugar consumption per person, ranking in at about 31.6 teaspoons which is 22-25 teaspoons more than recommended. This amount of sugar is, as you probably guessed, not good for your health as it contributes to tooth decay, weight problems, and increases risk of heart disease and diabetes.

The recommendations for sugar intake are about 6 teaspoons (25 grams) per day for women and 9 teaspoons (37.5 grams) per day for men. As the holiday season is upon us, start thinking about how you can decrease your added sugar intake. Some ideas could be:

- drink 100% fruit juice
- drink flavored seltzer water instead of soda
- cut out the flavored syrups in your coffee
- eat the fruit instead of drinking the juice