University of Richmond Employee Wellness

How to Reduce and Deal with Holiday Stress

Even though songs such as "Winter Wonderland" and "Jingle Bells" can make the winter holiday season seem like a time for pervasive cheer and mirth, in actuality, holidays can bring stress, depression and anxiety, which in turn can lead to physical problems such as weight gain and Holiday Heart Syndrome. But many people may be suffering in silence. After all, we don’t have songs such as “Rudolph the Depressed Reindeer,” “Santa Claus has Overeaten Again” or “Jingle Bell Stress” to raise awareness. So why may the holidays be stressful to you and what can you do about it?

Here are some common causes of holiday stress:

- “Sleigh Ride (will be delayed indefinitely due to unforeseen circumstances and we will be charging extra for checking in luggage and wearing pants)”: Holiday travel can be unpleasant with the increasingly crowded conditions and expenses.
- “All I Want for Christmas Is Some Cash”: With all the gift giving, parties and travel, the holidays can really stretch your budget, heightening any financial concerns.
- “Santa Claus is Coming to Town and So Are Mom, Dad, Grandpa, Grandma, Your Cousins, Your In-Laws, Your Aunt, Your Uncle, Your Daughter and Her New Boyfriend, and Your Son and Several Strange Friends”: The holidays can bring together people and accompanying drama.
- “Frosting the Snowman”: Food and beverages, including lots of unhealthy ones with lots of fat, salt and sugar, are everywhere, which can lead to overeating, weight gain, heartburn, remorse, regret and then more eating and drinking.
- “Silent Night”: Unfortunately, not everyone has loved ones or a social circle with whom to spend the holidays.

So what can you do to prevent and combat holiday stress?

- “Running Around the Christmas Tree”: Keep a regular exercise routine. Maintain your regular hobbies and regular eating habits...unless they are unhealthy.
- “Chestnuts Roasting in an Open Fire”: Try to eat healthily. Your mood and health are very closely tied to what you ingest.
- “Away in a Manger”: Get enough sleep to recharge and help handle stress. Also, take time out during the day to take breaks.
- “Blue Christmas”: Don’t be afraid to tell others about how you feel. You may be surprised to find that they are struggling with similar problems and can help provide empathy and social support. If you feel truly overwhelmed or ill, seek professional or medical help.
- “Twelve Days of Christmas”: Keep perspective, and if the Holidays are tough for you, remember that the Holiday season is temporary and will pass. Try not to take yourself and things too seriously. Just make sure you maintain healthy habits and avoid behaviors that will lead to health problems (such as gaining weight) beyond the holiday season.
- “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year”: Even if it doesn’t seem so to you, try to stay optimistic. Research has shown that optimism can have health benefits. Be open to new experiences and possibilities. Sometimes the best things in life are the most unexpected.

And if all of this doesn’t do enough to relieve your stress, you can always try singing...

Source: Bruce Y. Lee, Forbes Magazine
It seems you can’t go anywhere these days without hearing “the flu this” or “the flu that.” Unfortunately, this season’s influenza outbreak is one of the worst in years. And it’s not just the flu virus that’s causing problems; there are also many myths about the flu that are keeping people from doing more to prevent it. Mayo Clinic infectious diseases and vaccine expert Gregory Poland, M.D., dispels some of the most common:

Myth No. 1: Flu vaccines can give me the flu.
False. Injectable flu vaccines are composed of pieces of inactivated flu proteins — and it’s impossible for them to “cause” flu. The nasal spray vaccine has live flu organisms weakened so they cannot multiply or cause disease.

Myth No. 2: Flu shots never work anyways, so why bother?
Also false. When there is a good match between the viruses causing disease and those in the vaccine, protection is excellent in otherwise healthy people. Protection is lower if you are unhealthy or in the frail elderly group. But vaccines are like seat belts: They are not perfect but they are the best protection we have against serious injury and death.

Myth No. 3: Flu vaccines are dangerous, especially for pregnant women.
Also false. Concerns about pregnant women getting vaccinated began when women were advised not to get any kind of vaccination during pregnancy, Dr. Poland says. Today’s flu vaccines are safe for expectant mothers and highly recommended. However, because they have not been studied in pregnant women, pregnant women should stay away from nasal flu vaccines, which do contain live, weakened flu virus, Dr. Poland says.

Myth No. 4: It’s too late to get vaccinated.
Again, false. While it’s always better to get vaccinated before flu season begins — it can take about two weeks for the vaccination to take full effect — it’s never too late to get a flu vaccine, Dr. Poland says. Even if you didn’t get vaccinated and caught the flu, get a flu vaccine to protect yourself against the other strains that are circulating, Dr. Poland says.

Source: Mayo Clinic

Healthy Cooking: Jamaican Beef Stuffed Sweet Potatoes

**Ingredients:**
- 4 sweet potatoes
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 tbsp curry powder
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 lb ground beef, thawed
- 2 cups beef stock
- 3 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

**Directions:**
- Preheat oven to 400°F. Cover a rimmed baking sheet with foil.
- With a knife or a fork, poke holes all over the potato. Brush lightly with oil and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Place the potatoes on the baking sheet and bake until tender, 45-50 minutes.
- In a large sauce pan, melt butter over medium heat and add onion. Sauté until golden brown, about 5-7 minutes. Add the curry and garlic, sautéing for 2-3 minutes longer, until fragrant.
- Push the onions and garlic to the edges of your pan, turn up the heat to medium-high, and add the beef.
- Cook the beef until mostly browned, with very little pink left. Turn up the heat to high and add stock and Worcestershire sauce. Bring to a boil and cook until liquid is almost entirely gone.
- When the potatoes are finished cooking, allow to cool, then slice in half and scoop out a bit of the middle.
- Spoon the beef mixture into the potatoes and return to the oven. Bake for about 10 minutes, until the beef is brown and slightly crisp.
5 Health Tips for the Holiday Season

December is usually synonymous with an abundance of eating and a lack of exercise. We want to encourage you to start this New Year on the right foot. The holidays are a time for celebration and family, not to put on weight. It’s almost as if we’ve come to accept that we are going to put on 10 pounds during each holiday season. Celebration doesn’t have to mean gluttonous eating, or deprivation for that matter. It’s time to bring the focus back to the purpose of the holiday. Enjoy your friends and family, the time off, and the traditions of the holidays. Here are five ways to stay healthy.

Tip #1: Shop Well For Yourself: It is more important then ever to stock your kitchen with healthy foods. Have healthy snacks handy. The more convenient they are, the more likely you are to eat them. Instead of thinking about what you shouldn’t eat, promise to eat your 3 to 5 servings of vegetables each day.

Tips #2: Schedule Your Exercise: Your schedule will be very hectic this holiday season. Schedule your workouts just as you would any other appointment. It’s ok if you can’t make it to class, but make sure that you get some activity in at least three days per week.

Tip #3: Just Say No: You probably aren’t aware how much extra food you consume just from people offering it to you. A sample at the market here, an extra cookie at an office party there and it all adds up. Just think twice before you take that food and decide if you really want it.

Tip #4: Skip the Baking: Do you make baked goods for giving? Chances are you eat much of what you bake. Who wouldn’t? Instead make non-food gifts, or prepare ingredients for baked goods and put them in pretty jars--let your gift recipient bake it up. That way, they can eat it when they want it and you don’t have to be tempted in the kitchen.

Tip #5: Hydrate: Keep your water bottle with you at all times. You should be drinking eight, 8-oz glasses of water each day. One handy trick is to buy a 64 ounce water jug. Fill it up in the morning and know that you need to finish it by the end of the day.

Source: Active.com

Be Less Wasteful during the Holiday Season!

From Thanksgiving to New Years Day, household waste increases by more than 25%. Added food waste, shopping bags, packaging, wrapping paper, bows and ribbons all add up to an additional 1 million tons a week to our landfills.

In the US, annual trash from gift-wrap and shopping bags totals 4 million tons.

Each year, 50 million Christmas trees are purchased in the US. Of those, about 30 million go to the landfill.

Electricity bill for lighting a tree for 12 hours a day for 40 days:

- Incandescent lights: $25.13
- LEDs: $0.56

Half of the paper America consumes is used to wrap and decorate consumer products.
Many of us experience stress on a regular basis, and it affects each one of us differently. Excess stress can have a negative impact on our health, and one of the most common results of stress is a change in eating pattern. Some people skip meals, diet excessively, consume excess amounts of caffeine, sugar, salt or fat, or over/under eat during periods of stress.

Here are some guidelines for healthy eating during a stressful time:

- Start each morning with breakfast. It will help you stay alert and prevent overeating.
- Try not to skip meals. If you don’t have an appetite, liquids (such as smoothie) can sometimes be tolerated better.
- Eat balanced meals of carbohydrates, protein and fruits and vegetables. Make an effort to choose food that is low in fat and whole grain. High fat foods make us feel lethargic and decrease our ability to deal with stress.
- Try to develop a normal eating schedule. Space your meals and snacks out about every 3-4 hours.
- Get regular physical activity to help relieve stress or explore other options to relieve stress other than food.
- Make sure you drink plenty of water.