



## Enjoy the holidays without all the stress



I have to think about a gift for Aunt Sally who has everything, prepare all the food for the big Holiday brunch, I have two parties to go to on the same night, plus write out all of my holiday cards. Does this sound familiar to you?

If it does that's because the holiday season is in full swing and along with all the excitement of parties, and family gatherings comes your most unwelcome holiday guest, stress. The holiday season is one of the most stressful times of the year and with so much going on, it is hard to find time to relax. Managing holiday stress is difficult and the last thing you want to happen is to get sick and not be able to attend all of your holiday parties and get-togethers! Managing stress is a lot

easier by realizing what causes the stress to begin with. Let's look at some of the possible sources that can lead to stress.

### Common Stressors During the Holiday Season

- Relationships — Turmoil or conflict with a family can cause stress. Conflicts and tension can arise over many issues, past and present. Spending the holidays without your loved ones can also make this time of year hard to deal with.
- Money — Financial stress may also put a cloud over holiday giving. Many people overspend during this time of year. Being able to balance your budget throughout the year and perhaps set money aside all year round is a good plan. Not being able to buy something that you want to buy for someone can be stressful.
- Physical Demands — Attending holiday parties, shopping, and planning can leave your body exhausted. Also, over eating, drinking, and staying up late can also contribute to being tired. Getting quality sleep and time to rest is sometimes difficult to do. On the other hand, holidays are exciting. Perhaps you are going to see someone that you haven't seen in awhile or celebrate your granddaughter's first holiday. Good stress can also be tiring.

Stress at any time of the year can have harmful consequences, but especially during the winter season. Prolonged stress can weaken your immune system and it is important to keep healthy during these months because of the flu and other common viruses going around. Also stress can lead to depression. This time of the year is about joy and happiness and you don't want to put a negative outlook on such a positive time.

### Tips to Help Manage Your Stress

- Don't forget about your healthy habits! Don't let yourself overindulge too much and be sure to get plenty of sleep and exercise to keep yourself rejuvenated.
- Plan your time wisely. Using your time in the best way possible not only helps you reduce stress but it makes you very productive. Don't wait until the last minute to get things together.
- Recognize your feelings, it is never good to bottle up how you feel. If the holidays are a hard time for you talk to someone about it. Just because it is the holidays you can't make yourself be happy, so if you need to cry for a little or reflect take the time to do it.
- Try coming up with a budget. Sticking with a budget can reduce stress not only during the holiday season, but after the holidays are over. If you don't have the money then don't spend it.
- Don't get too concerned with perfection. Don't stretch yourself too thin to come up with the perfect holiday party or event, stay true to yourself and if it doesn't work out, well then there is always next year!

It is important to realize that the holidays can be a stressful time, but like many other things, if you prepare for them properly and practice stress management then you can really enjoy this time of year. Remember that stress leads to a weaker immune system and no one wants to get sick around the holidays, so you should also look into getting your flu shot during this time. Simply ask your doctor about you immunizations and make sure you are keeping up with all of them. Also, staying physically active will help combat stress and depression. Most importantly, maintain social contact, because nothing is better than sharing the holidays with the ones you love.

In other words, practice the "10 Keys"™ to Healthy Aging. These tips and many more can lead to not only a "Healthier Holiday," but a "Healthier Tomorrow"!

*This column was written by Sydney Etheredge, Center for HealthyAgingStudent Intern. For more information please call 412-580-1313. For more Information about Stress , check out the Center for Healthy Aging's website at [www.healthyaging.pitt.edu](http://www.healthyaging.pitt.edu) and [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)*

*CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Center for Disease Control. For questions and more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit [www.healthyaging.pitt.edu](http://www.healthyaging.pitt.edu)*