

Tackle the Holiday Stress Once and For All!

For most of us, stress is a year 'round occurrence. But come holiday season, family, school, social, and work commitments add another dimension to an already maxed out lifestyle.

Some function very well, even thrive, with a low level of stress if they can find some release to help them relax. Chronic physical or mental stress, left unchecked, plays a big role in how our bodies function. Stress is a neurotoxin. That means that over time, stress can kill brain cells! Stress causes inflammation and a host of other health problems like heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, headaches, gastrointestinal issues, and a weakened immune system. Did you ever notice how easy it is to catch someone else's cold when you are feeling run down?

Following are some ideas to help lessen the anxiety and keep you sane and healthy through the holidays and beyond.

To maintain focus and function, you need to be well-fed, well-rested, and well-hydrated. Like stress, dehydration and lack of food also affects decision making and productivity. Don't get so busy that you forget to eat, or choose the wrong type of food. Drink plenty of water, seltzer, and green tea. These fluids will also curb your appetite, increase your energy levels, and decrease the chance of holiday weight gain (also an added stressor). Make sure you eat at least every 3-4 hours and choose lean protein foods and lots of vegetables and fruits. Your brain thrives on carbs, so don't start the Atkins diet now. Keep nuts, hard boiled eggs, low fat cheese and whole grain crackers in the office or car for snack attacks and tell yourself that only on the actual holiday, will you indulge.

Adequate rest is also needed to function at your peak. Try not to stay up late to finish a project and then exist on caffeine. Too much caffeine will intensify anxiety and further hinder your sleep, which is needed for repair and recovery. It's been proven that less than 5 hours sleep is detrimental to your health. Lack of sleep also impairs your ability to regulate appetite and hunger, again adding to the holiday weight gain issue.

Here are some more ideas to help you keep your sanity during the holidays.

1. Keep to-do lists and allow a week to accomplish what you normally do in a day.
2. Praise yourself for the things you crossed off your list. Resist feeling guilty about things you didn't get to – yet.
3. Tell yourself, “If it's not life or death, it can wait another day.”
4. Practice this mantra, “Everything will get done in time.”

And lastly, but most importantly, remember to exercise. Exercise decreases stress, clears the mind, helps to avoid holiday weight gain, and makes you feel powerful and energetic. Continue to do at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days to give your mind a break, and keep your body strong. Vow to make some of these changes and plan to look forward to the holidays this year.

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