

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Clark R. Mills

Ten Ways to Reduce Holiday Stress

Frantic shopping, last-minute gift wrapping, planning multiple parties ...

The holiday season can be fun, but it can also be marked by over-commitments and stress. And, mental health experts warn that this year, holiday stress will be amplified due to the current financial crisis.

Doctors of chiropractic emphasize the connection between emotional stress and physical health. To help reduce anxiety and stay well this holiday season, Dr. Mills has compiled a list of 10 simple stress-busting tips. You'll be surprised by how easy it is to remain relaxed during the busiest month of the year.



Physical-Emotional Link

Did you know that emotional stress is linked to colds and flu as well as chronic diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, heart disease and depression? Chiropractors know that reducing stress boosts wellness.

That's why Dr. Mills instructs patients about the *chiropractic lifestyle*, which is a mode of living that emphasizes disease prevention through healthy choices. Keeping tabs on stress is a fundamental part of this lifestyle.

This way of life centers on respecting the connection between body, mind and spirit.

Watch for Early Signs

Dr. Mills urges patients to be aware of early signs of stress, such as irritabil-

ity, fatigue, inability to relax or sleep, loss of appetite or feeling overwhelmed. Don't dismiss these alarm signals as "normal" feelings to be endured around the holidays.

Instead of wishing the holidays were over, take action. Consider the following 10 tips as a blueprint to a stress-free holiday.

1 Check With the Doctor

Before the holidays get underway, make an appointment with Dr. Mills. Research shows that chiropractic care reduces stress and enhances immune function.

What's more, chiropractic care eliminates spinal dysfunction associated with stress. A common malady, known as *vertebral subluxation*, may be sparked by emotional stress. Vertebral subluxation is a condition in which motion is limited in areas of the spine or spinal bones (vertebrae) are slightly out of place.

Dr. Mills uses *chiropractic adjustments*, specialized and gentle maneuvers, to correct vertebral subluxations and accompanying dysfunction.

2 Maintain a Healthy Diet

Eating a healthy diet, low in sugar and unhealthy fats — and loaded with fresh fruit and vegetables — is a fantastic way to keep stress at bay.

How is eating nutritiously possible with the ubiquitous holiday parties and treats? It's not easy, but it can be done. For instance, limit tempting food favorites to just one treat per event.



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Design festive fruit trays for parties, instead of desserts. Prepare craft items, rather than baked goods, for hostess gifts. Opt to cook with olive oil instead of butter. Drink plenty of water and eat several healthy snacks throughout the day, especially before a holiday bash.

3 Exercise

Exercise is a proven stress-busting technique. Aerobic exercise literally reduces the production and effects of key stress hormones, such as cortisol.

This month, try creative ways to exercise, such as ice skating, walking the neighborhood to view holiday lights or dancing to holiday music. Aim for 60 minutes of aerobic activity each day.

Exercise outdoors whenever possible. Connecting with nature is a powerful stress buster. And, a little sunlight will lift your spirits and relieve stress, especially if you suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which is also known as winter depression. SAD is triggered by the loss of light during the winter months.

4 Avoid Holiday Debt

Decide how much you can spend before you shop — and stick to your budget. If you're overwhelmed with too many gifts to buy, consider starting a name exchange. Most likely others will appreciate a break as well!

If you're hosting a party, create a budget for food and decorations, or consider hosting a pot-luck. Simply gathering friends and family together is special enough. Spending a great deal of money doesn't mean it will be the perfect affair or that anyone will have a better time.

5 Stay Flexible

Are you disappointed when events, such as holidays, don't turn out as you have imagined? Many people have unrealistic expectations for the holidays, particularly how family members will interact. This is a major source of holiday-related stress.

Keep an open mind. For instance, if the plan is to drive around and check out holiday lights, but the weather or traffic interferes, adapt quickly without regret or worry. Gathering the family for songs around the fire may be just as fun.

6 Keep It Simple

Are you planning a five-course, gourmet meal for your extended family of 20? Unless you are among the rare group of people who consider cooking for large parties a form of stress relief, simplify meal planning. Focus on dishes that may be prepared ahead of time and reheated. And don't shy away from asking guests to bring a dish as well. Remember: Relaxed fun is more important than perfection.

7 Be Organized

Make a list and check it twice before you shop for groceries or gifts. Sticking to the list will dramatically reduce stress.

If you're planning to hit the road, compile a packing list on paper. Pack a couple days before your trip. If possible, load up the car the day prior to your departure. Plan that you'll run into some holiday traffic, so make sure that you have supplies needed to keep kids occupied. Allowing for extra time to travel will further cut down on your stress.

8 Start Early

Shop early for gifts to avoid lines and pandemonium at the malls. Or, better yet, shop online. Many companies offer free holiday shipping for orders placed well in advance. Also, consider purchasing gift cards for anyone on your list. Many supermarkets and drug stores sell gift cards to a vast array of stores.

If you're mailing gifts anywhere — from the next town to around the world — don't wait until the last minute. You'll save both money and stress.

9 Appreciate What You Have

Remember that the holidays come only once a year — and that each year is a gift. Take a moment to stop and smell the roses.

Appreciate the simple things that you may be taking for granted. Instead of rushing through wrapping the gifts, pop in some holiday music or a favorite DVD, and savor the process. Don't worry about having every gift perfectly boxed and wrapped. Instead, use gift bags whenever possible. Not only do they save time and frustration, but they may also be easily recycled.



10 Take a Break

Even Santa's elves get to take a break. If you've been working non-stop at a frenzied pace, take time out to do something you enjoy. It may mean adapting your plans a bit, but preventing stress-related illness should be a priority. Treat yourself to a massage, an hour alone with a good book or special dinner with a loved one.

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