



Stress relief over the holiday season

For many of us, the holiday season is a time of fun, laughter and family togetherness. However, for many it's the season of stress. There are just so many things to do and limited time to do them in. Working people may feel especially harassed, trying to cram end of year activities into their already limited "leisure" time.

If you're one of those people feeling more frazzled than festive, taking the time to use a few time management strategies can really reduce the stress; you'll feel as if you're in control. Here are a few strategies to reduce your stress.

- **Create a list** and check items off as they are accomplished.
- **Set a budget** - work out how much you can spend on gifts, food, activities, etc and stick to it.
- **Pick and choose your activities** - make more time for yourself and the family by choosing something stress relieving, i.e. touring the festive lights in your neighbourhood rather than spending hours writing cards.
- **Get help** - This year, give yourself the gift of holiday stress relief by hiring a cleaning service to clean your home, or having your holiday season party or festive dinner catered. Think about how much your time (and sanity) is worth, and contract out accordingly. Use the gift wrapping services that many businesses provide this time of year and assign some tasks to other family members.
- **Shop online** - Reduce stress by shopping and buying gifts online. In many cases, your gifts will then be delivered right to your home.
- **Relax** - Take time out to relax. Attend a holiday concert in the park, take a walk in the evenings and enjoy the summer season.
- **Plan ahead** - Supplies, such as decorations and gift wrap, are often available at discounted prices from the 26th December, and they don't go bad! It's easy enough to buy gifts any time of year; all it takes is some planning.
- **Budget for next year** - Start putting aside money now each week for next year or consider opening a separate saving account.

The festive gathering

If you are attending or hosting the festive dinner, no doubt the nerves will kick in. As well as looking forward to seeing family and friends you haven't seen for a while, there may be some people you may not rather see. Either way, try to relax and enjoy the day.

- **Seating arrangements** - If there is someone coming to dinner that you dislike, avoid sitting opposite them and instead seat them to one side and opposite somebody who they get on with better. Invite a few more reasonable people along as it will help dilute any stress caused by relatives. It's a case of the more the merrier!
- **Decaffeinated or herbal drinks** - When your body is under stress it produces cortisol which prepares you for 'fight or flight' situations. Caffeine does too. Offer everybody decaffeinated coffee and tea, or herbal tea alternatives, since this will help keep the stress levels down.
- **Escape plan** - It's a good idea to have some pre-planned excuses to escape from proceedings if they get too stressful. Be imaginative and use things such as leaving the room to make a phone-call to a friend. Just by having planned a couple of escape routes you'll probably feel less stressed anyway but actually leaving the situation, even for 10 minutes, will help clear your mind and relax you.
- **Alcohol** - Avoid excessive alcohol as it dehydrates your body and can also hinder quality sleep. Drink as much water or juice as alcohol as this will help you to stay hydrated, feel better and therefore cope better with stressful situations.
- **Sleep well** - Lack of sleep can make you feel irritable and more prone to feeling stressed.
- **Exercise** - The season is a time of excessive eating. Exercise is a great way to reduce stress as it helps produce mood-enhancing endorphins. Try going for a walk after dinner as the fresh air and exercise will lift your mood and make you feel better.
- **Keep calm** - Play some relaxing music and burn some scented candles, incense or aromatherapy oil.
- **Have fun** - try to relax and have fun. If you do find others around you difficult then try to rise above the situation. Make happy memories.

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