



Holiday Hints & Helps: Keeping Stress in Check

Signs of Stress

Physical:

- Headache
- Diarrhea/Constipation
- Muscle tightness in chest, neck, back, or jaw
- Fatigue
- Sleep problems

Emotional:

- Irritability
- Depression
- Angry outbursts
- Nightmares

Behavioral:

- Increased smoking or drug/alcohol abuse
- Overeating
- Hostility
- Insomnia

Cognitive:

- Forgetfulness
- Preoccupation
- Less productivity
- Lack of concentration
- Blurred vision

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Preventing Stress

- Establish realistic goals and stick with them.
- Limit your drinking.
- Don't feel obligated to be in the holiday spirit. Forcing yourself to feel happy will only make you feel worse when you don't achieve that feeling.
- Know your spending limit and adhere to it. Overspending and accumulation of debt will only cause undue stress.
- Stop striving for perfection. You don't need to have the biggest and best of everything. Holidays are not a competition; you don't have to have a better party than Aunt Sally did last year.
- Learn to say no.
- Plan ahead. With a little forethought and a lot of perseverance, your holidays will run smoothly and (almost) stress-free.



Headaches are one of the first signs of stress. Being aware of the symptoms will help you better cope.

Ways to Cope

Relaxation Exercises:

- *Deep breathing.* Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth. Repeat five or six times.
- *Whole body tension.* Tense every muscle in your body. Hold for as long as you can without pain, then slowly release. Repeat three times.
- *Shoulder shrugs and head rolls.* Raise your shoulders to your ears, hold for the count of four, then lower your shoulders to the normal position. Slowly rotate your head and neck, first one way, then the other.

Other Tips:

- *Go for a walk.* Maintaining healthy habits will help alleviate the holiday blues.
- *Don't sweat the small stuff.* Concentrate on what's important: health and family. The rest is just details.
- *Take a break.* You don't have to be everything to everyone. Let someone else have control. Delegate.
- *Volunteer.* Helping those less fortunate can make you feel good.