

Surviving Holiday Stress  
By: Nicole Majka, LPC, CDVP

Holidays can be a magical, joyous and exciting time of year. The perfect tree has been found and decorated. Presents are carefully wrapped and placed around the tree. The holiday meal is prepared and awaiting family and friends for the perfect Christmas and holiday gathering. So what's wrong with this picture? Unless your family is representative of a Norman Rockwell painting, then there is a lot to be said.

For most of us, the holiday season can be joyous and exciting, but can be equally (or more so) stressful. Fighting for parking spaces in the mall, standing in long lines at the check out, finding last minute bargains, braving freezing cold weather, facing job loss or financial strains, not to mention having in-laws, parents and siblings who have less than a cordial relationship in the same room spells holiday stress in a big way!

Experiencing holiday stress may be unavoidable, but there are a number of things which can be done to minimize the reading on our stress meter. Setting limits with the amount of time spent with family or friends is a good first step. Any parent can tell you that a car full of small children dragged from grandparents to in-laws makes for cranky children and parents by night's end. Setting time limits and boundaries will make for overall improved quality time spent with friends and loved ones. In addition, limit spending on gifts or participate in a grab bag to ease post holiday financial hangover. Don't be afraid to be creative and make gifts! Homemade gifts are more personal and special and will save an avalanche of credit card bills come January.

Along with setting boundaries and limiting time, moderation is another excellent way to manage holiday stress. Ever heard the phrase "Too much of anything is a bad thing?" Well, it's true especially around the holidays when homemade Christmas cookies, candy and treats are in abundance. All the holiday parties can lead many of us into trouble. The best way to handle food around the holidays is to eat small frequent meals and remember to eat plenty of whole grains and vegetables which will provide quality sustainable energy and prevent a sugar high then crash. If alcohol is consumed, limit your amount and never drink and drive.

Aside from the obvious go, go, go of the holiday season many people struggle with grief and loss of friends and loved ones. If you happen to have lost a loved one this year, as I have, memories of Christmas and the holiday season can bring a flood of emotions ranging from happy to inconsolable grief. Honor your feelings and allow yourself to remember the good times, talk openly with friends, family or a therapist about your feelings. Most important, do not force feelings you don't have. Instead, be open and honest, chances are others in your family have similar feelings. If your grief and sadness persists see a therapist or doctor right away especially if feeling suicidal.

The keys to surviving holiday stress include: moderating time, money and holiday treats, setting boundaries with family and friends, and honoring feelings which will lead to a more joyous holiday season for you and your family. From all of us at Heritage Counseling Center may all of you have a very blessed and joyful holiday season!