



Dealing with HOLIDAY STRESS

By Lisa Crandall

The holiday season has arrived once again, a stretch of weeks that is often filled with love and laughter, a time of hectic busy-ness, high levels of emotion that run the extremes of juggling family politics, to the loneliness of being away from some family members. We also often find ourselves facing financial challenges, as well as too much not necessarily good for you food, plus the shock of cold temperatures and less daylight, often inconvenient weather events, along with the whack of other things that can culminate into an overwhelming crescendo of emotions. (breathe) Did you get through that sentence without pausing or gasping for air? That's what this season can be like and it can be stressful.

Taking care of yourself during the holiday season is important. By the time you are

reading this it is almost too late to suggest you should ease the strain by starting early, with a budget and a plan. But if you can, try to get things done early – like the baking and the decorating and at least some of the shopping.

Once the season starts, it's up to you to do what you can to help yourself get through it, so you can enjoy it.

Perhaps these suggestions will help:

Make time to get a little exercise. It can be as simple as walking to the mail box. Moving around improves your blood circulation and getting out of doors will energize you. Going for a walk every day can also allow you to savour some alone time away from the crowds and chaos.

Eat well: This must not be mistaken for overeating or indulgent eating, both easily accomplished this time of year. Focus on fresh healthy food, for instance; serve a veggie and fruit platter instead of chips and dips when you have guests, or if you are standing at someone else's buffet table. Make soups instead of heavy meals. Do not shop or arrive at a party while hungry.

Get enough sleep. More and more studies have shown that getting enough sleep is critical. Getting less than 7-8 hours of sleep each night has been linked to everything from obesity to heart disease. At the very least, turn off the TV, the electronics and the people for an hour before you try to fall

asleep. Allow your body that brief respite from external stimulation before you try to sleep.

When you are in the moment and it all catches up with you - change your physical state of being. For example; take a deep breath, hold it for two or three beats, let it out, then do it again as many times as necessary to become calm.

A couple other quick exercises are: Gently pull down on your earlobes. This will help bring blood to your head to help you feel more awake and alert. Rub the roof of your mouth with your tongue. It gives you a quick nerve jolt. Roll up and down on your toes. This increases blood circulation and you can do it standing in line at the grocery store or the bank.

Ultimately allow yourself to go slow occasionally. Treat yourself to small pleasures – read a good book, take a nap, plan for a few moments to soak in a warm tub, sip a second cup of coffee while you're planning your day.

Finally: If you know you are going to be just crazy busy because there's too much to do, why not stretch the season? Your community Christmas gathering or the office party can be scheduled in January and still have a seasonal theme. Don't worry about taking down the tree and the decorations quite so quickly. Let them linger and let yourself enjoy them in a quieter way for a few extra days or weeks. **LH**

Editor's Note: *If you are struggling to cope with feelings that seem seriously out of whack, even for you, the Canadian Mental Health Association website has a series of short informative videos that can offer encouragement and techniques for dealing with depression and anxiety which can be exacerbated this time of year. They are part of an online self-help program called "Bounce Back". They are available at <http://ontario.cmha.ca/bounce-back-ontario/bounceback-for-clients/>.*