



Maintain Don't Gain

Week 5: Holiday Stress Busters

Holiday stress sets in when you try to do it all. Ann Vernon, counseling professor at the University of Northern Iowa, defines stress as “**an emotional reaction to circumstances when you feel out of control.**” Take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can happen during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

5 Tips to Beat Holiday Stress:

1. Take a Breather

- ❖ Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone without distractions may be all you need to refresh your mind and body.
- ❖ Take a walk, listen to soothing music, and find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind and slowing your breathing.
- ❖ When you clear your mind look for alternatives around the stressor. Be realistic and tell yourself, “If I have time, I’ll do this and that. If not, I’ll only do that.”

2. Don't abandon healthy habits

- ❖ Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all because it only adds to more stress and guilt.
- ❖ Have a healthy snack before holiday parties.
- ❖ Continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity.

3. Stick to a Budget

- ❖ Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget.
- ❖ Don't try to buy happiness with an overload of gifts. Donate to a charity in someone's name, give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.

4. Plan Ahead

- ❖ Set specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities.
- ❖ Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. This will prevent last-minute grocery shopping and keeping within your budget.
- ❖ If you need time to work around the house, hire a babysitter or ask your niece/nephew to take the kids out.
- ❖ If your schedule is completely packed, delegate each family member to help you out. For example, assign each person a room to clean.

5. Don't Give in to the “Gimmies”

- ❖ Giving into every, “I want, I want!” can cause financial distress.
- ❖ It's okay to tell your child that a gift is too expensive. Even Santa Claus has limited funds.
- ❖ Focus on holiday traditions that don't cost any extra money. Bake cookies, go caroling or skating as a family outing.
- ❖ Give to needy families, or volunteer. Explain to your kids that there are a lot of families who don't have as much as they do. Incorporate the spirit of giving by asking them to pick an old toy to donate to the less fortunate.

6. Learn to say no

- ❖ Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed.
- ❖ Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity.
- ❖ If you must attend an event, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.

7. Be Realistic About Relatives

- ❖ When the in-laws visit, have realistic expectations for the *short term*.
- ❖ Don't try to solve past issues with family members over the holidays. Use discretion, and remember there is no need to bring up every little irritation.
- ❖ If going to a certain relative's house every year causes a lot of holiday stress, try changing the location or maybe go there every other year

5 Signs You Need to Bust Some Holiday Stress

1. You're irritable.
2. You're losing sleep.
3. You're losing or gaining weight (although hard to tell around the holidays).
4. You feel tense — with muscle aches or headaches.
5. You feel overwhelmed.

Stress and Weight Gain



The “stress hormone” **cortisol** is secreted during times of physical or psychological stress in which the normal pattern of secretion can be altered. Cortisol stimulates insulin release and maintenance of blood sugar levels. The end result can be an increase in appetite.

The disruption of cortisol secretion may not only promote weight gain, but it can also affect where you put on the weight. Some studies have shown that stress and elevated cortisol tend to cause fat deposition in the *abdominal area* rather than in the hips. Aka “toxic fat”, abdominal fat deposition is strongly correlated with the development of cardiovascular disease including heart attacks and strokes. The amount of cortisol secreted in response to stress can vary among individuals, with some persons being innately more "reactive" to stressful events.

Resources:

<http://fun.familyeducation.com/>,

<http://www.medicinenet.com/>,

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/>

