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Holiday Stress Management

Keep Your Good Health in this Season of Good Cheer With these Holiday Stress Tips

BY LINDA EGENES

'Tis the season to be jolly. But just as all work and no play can make Jack a dull boy, Jack (and Jill, too) can feel overwhelmed by multiple holiday parties and rich foods.

The mental pressure of making hairsplitting decisions (does Uncle Harry really need another pair of socks?), staying up late, and rushing around during the holidays creates stress and imbalance in your body. This could have negative effects on your health and well being.

So how do you meet all your social obligations, pay your bills, and keep your weight down when confronted with the extravaganza of food, gifts, and parties that has become our American tradition?

Here are seven Ayurvedic tips for staying well when the holidays roll around.

1. Set priorities. Getting enough rest is the key to keeping your mind and body in balance. If you start losing sleep over holiday stress, it's time to stop and reassess your priorities. Going to bed well before 10:00 p.m. and rising early go a long way in maintaining a calm and clear mind.

If you can't sleep because your mind is busy looking for holiday gift ideas for dad, try drinking a cup of warm milk with turmeric and cardamom before bed. Aroma therapy with orange or lavender scents is relaxing and can help you fall asleep.

Ayurvedic herbal compounds containing herbs such as Indian Valerian are sometimes recommended for relaxing the body and promoting more restful sleep.

2. Reduce stress by simplifying shopping. According to one survey, 36 percent cited gift shopping as their biggest holiday stress. Not knowing what to buy or where to buy it was the major source of shopping anxiety, while others said fighting the crowds or not having enough time to shop created the most pressure.

To simplify gift-giving, try buying an inexpensive eco-gift and give it to most people on your list. I knew a family that bought a case of homemade organic jam from a local farmer, glued a personal label on each bottle, and gave it to all the families on their list. While not everyone will want to be this frugal, by buying the same gift for friends and neighbors, you can cut down on the stress of selecting the perfect holiday gifts for coworkers or a wide circle of friends.

For family, you'll want to give more personal gifts. But if you're planning a large family party, try drawing names and giving one nice gift instead of a dozen less expensive ones.

3. Try to plan your holiday parties for daytime instead of evening. The holidays are when people break out their best holiday baking recipes, so how can you enjoy those holiday cookies without gaining weight? Digestion reaches its peak at noon—so that's the best time to eat large holiday feasts. You'll digest the food easier, without putting on pounds.

4. Exercise daily. If you can't do anything else, find the time for a short walk in fresh air. If you have the time to do more, all the better. Exercise will help you think more clearly, sleep more deeply, and minimize stress in your life.

5. Drink hot fluids. Start your day with a cup of hot water, and sip from a thermos throughout the day. This will flush out digestive impurities and toxins that are the inevitable result of holiday eating. Or make a tea: in 2 quarts of boiled water, steep 1/4 tsp. whole fennel, 1/4 tsp. marshmallow root, and 2 mint leaves. This will help stimulate sluggish elimination and keep sweets from overwhelming your system.

6. Practice a stress reduction technique such as the Transcendental Meditation program or yoga postures. These techniques will help you remain calm and balanced instead of succumbing to holiday stress during the most hectic time of year.

7. Prevent holiday angst. For some people, the holidays bring emotional trauma, due to painful

memories or family conflict. From the Ayurvedic perspective, experiences like this can lead to imbalances that also affect digestion.

To relieve emotional holiday stress, Maharishi Ayurveda recommends eating more astringent, bitter, and sweet foods (this doesn't mean holiday sweets, but whole grain rice, wheat, and whole milk products) to cool the body and soothe the heart. Flavor your food with cooling spices, such as cinnamon, fennel, and coriander. Drink rose petal tea or hot milk to soothe the emotions when they are stirred up. Resist skipping meals and get to bed early to create more balance. Soothe your heart while you sleep with rose aroma oil.

Ayurveda also recommends herbs for soothing emotional stress. Two important herbs for this purpose are Arjuna and Ashwaganda, which are often contained in ayurvedic compounds for reducing emotional imbalances.

8. Pamper yourself. Make a list of positive, nurturing things you can do for yourself during the holiday season. A massage after work, for instance, can melt away seasonal blues and leave you with a genuine holiday glow. Take your grandchild to an ice-skating rink for a festive outing that doesn't focus on eating or buying. Think outside the box—the holidays don't have to be materialistic. In fact, it helps to remember that the real meaning of "holiday" is "holy day"—and with a little effort we can emerge from the season feeling more healthy and whole.

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