

Ask an Expert: How to Find Relief from Holiday Stress

Margie Memmott

12/11/2015



According to the National Headache Foundation, people complain of a greater incidence of tension-type headaches and migraines between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Family stress, long lines and altered sleep and eating patterns play a key role. Consider these tips to reduce stress and tension this holiday season.

- Exercise regularly. This helps you relax and let off steam. Also watch what you eat.
- Try relaxation and stretching exercises such as neck rolls and slow, deep breathes to reduce muscle tension and headaches.
- If an especially unpleasant task faces you, do it early in the day and get it over with. The rest of your day will be free of anxiety.
- Learn to delegate responsibility to others.
- Forget about counting to 10. Count to 100 before doing or saying anything that could make matters worse.
- Have a forgiving view of events and people. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world.
- Get involved with other people. Do something for somebody. Do something with somebody.
- Say "no" more often. It's amazing how much stress can be eliminated by giving up unrewarding activities, refusing inappropriate requests and turning down invitations from people you don't enjoy.
- Find humor in every disaster. You can usually find something funny if you look for it. No disaster is so bad that it couldn't be worse.
- De-clutter your life. Get rid of clothes you never wear, objects that collect dust, furniture you hate and activities you don't enjoy.
- Make friends with non-worriers. Nothing can get you into the habit of worrying faster than associating with chronic worrywarts.
- Create order out of chaos. Organize your home and workspace so that you always know exactly where things are. Have a place for everything and everything in its place.
- Become more flexible. Some things are worth not doing perfectly, and compromise can be found on some issues. Ask yourself if it will matter in five years.
- Eliminate destructive self-talk such as, "I'm too old..., I'm too fat..."
- Shun the superman/superwoman urge. Be realistic. Set practical goals and simplify.
- Take a break. A change of pace, no matter how short, can give you a new outlook on old problems.
- When a problem is beyond your control, learn to recognize and accept it.
- Get up 15 minutes earlier. The inevitable morning mishaps will be less stressful.
- Don't rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, when to pick up your prescription, when projects are due, etc. An old Chinese proverb states, "The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory."
- Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.
- Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full. Keep a well-stocked shelf of home staples. Don't wait until you're down to your last cup of flour to buy more.
- Don't put up with something that doesn't work right. If such things as your alarm clock, wallet, shoelaces or toaster are a constant aggravation, get them fixed or get new ones.
- Be ready to wait. Reading a chapter of an e-book on your phone or keeping in touch on social media can make time spent standing in line or sitting in a waiting room almost pleasant. Everything takes a little longer than you expect, even if you already expect it to take longer.
- Count your blessings. For every one thing that goes wrong, there are probably 10 or 50 or 100 blessings and things that go right. Count them!

By: Margie Memmott, USU Extension associate professor, 435-623-3451, margie.memmott@usu.edu

Direct column topics to Julene Reese, Utah State University Extension writer, 435-757-6418; julene.reese@usu.edu What

Next?Get useful tips like this as soon as we release them. Sign up here.