Holiday Stress

• Effects of stress

  • There is a proven connection between stress and illness. Our bodies DNA have a component called a telomere that acts like a clock. Every time our cell divides it shortens, to counteract this we produce an enzyme, telomerase, which protects our cell by adding more DNA at the end of the telomere. When we are stressed, the body produces cortisol, a hormone that suppresses telomerase. This causes people under chronic stress to have shorter telomeres, which research says increases our immune systems vulnerability to illness.

  (Libov, 2008)

  • Stress has a lot a nasty health effects, these include increased risk for:

    • Heart disease and heart attacks

    • Skin conditions: psoriasis and shingles

    • Exacerbate digestive conditions and immune disorders

    • Anxiety, depression, and insomnia

    • Increase pain, especially if you already have arthritis, back pain, or muscle spasms

  (Libov, 2008)

• Changes in stress levels at the holidays

![Pie chart showing changes in stress levels at the holidays: 54% stay the same, 38% increase, 8% decrease.](chart)
• Causes of stress during the holidays

- Lack of time
- Lack of money
- My Children
- Travel
- Increasing my credit card debt
- Staying on diet
- Family gatherings
- Pressure of getting or giving gifts
- Commercialism or hype

(Greenberg & Berktold, 2006)

• Strategies to avoid and defend against stress

  - Have less expectation: don’t go all out and try to make this year the best ever.
  - Set realistic goals, and try to be organized. Write a list of the most important activities and things to do. Do not plan too much.
• Be realistic about what you can do. Don’t spend too much time preparing for one day

• Let go of the past: the holidays might not be like they used to, change does happen. Each year should be enjoyed in its own way. This is especially true for those who have lost loved ones, it is good to enjoy memories, but also to look to the future.

• Do something for someone else: try volunteering some time to help others, or buying gifts for a child in need.

• Enjoy holiday activities that are free: driving around to admire decorations and attending free community events.

• Do not drink too much alcohol: after all it is a depressant

• Spend time with “supportive” people who care about you: Sometimes getting together with family is what increases the stress for a lot of people. Make sure to make time for the other important people in your life that might make you enjoy the holiday season more. If you have lost touch the holidays are a great time to make contact with old friends.

• Find time for yourself, relax!: while we know exercising can help decrease stress, resting can also help, especially at this time of year. Working for days for just one meal will make anyone tired. Take time to watch a holiday special on TV, listening to holiday music, or taking an afternoon nap.

• Cheat on your diet: It’s okay to cheat a little on dieting, but overindulging will only add to your stress later. Try to have small servings of traditional favorites, and fill up on the healthier options.

(DeCarli, 2012)

• Other great standbys that are good to combat stress during all times of the year include:
  o Prayer
  o Reading
  o Going to church
  o Exercise
  o Meditation

(Greenberg & Berktold, 2006)