

The Most Wonderful or Stressful Time of Year?

Though known as “the most wonderful time of the year,” a study by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research found that people are more likely to feel increased stress during the holiday season. This could be due to increased financial burdens, pressures of gift buying, finding time to attend or host events, and seasonal depression.

When you're in a stressful situation, your hypothalamus, a tiny region at the base of your brain, sets off an alarm system. Through a combination of nerve and hormonal signals, this system prompts a release of hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. This causes your heartbeat and breathing to speed up and your muscles to tense.

The body can usually recuperate quickly from a single stressful situation. However, it's when the condition becomes chronic that it poses a serious health threat, leading to heart conditions, depression, and rapid aging.

Knowing what causes your stress is the first step in fighting it. Then, do what you can to reduce it, or eliminate it completely. No, we're not saying that you should cancel the holidays, but we are suggesting that you take it easy (see tips on how to manage holiday stress below) and be aware of signs such as fatigue or insomnia, irritability, or just a constant feeling of worry that indicate you may be dealing with stress. Be sure to see your family physician for any evidence of chronic stress.



Have a Holly, Jolly, Stress-free Holiday

The holidays can provoke unique stresses. Knowing how to avoid them can help.

- Do less, enjoy more. It's okay to respectfully decline that extra holiday invite that you just received and would have to buy another gift for... and it's okay to take a day for yourself and just relax.
- Don't isolate yourself. Some interaction with family or friends, or even a support group, is good for you if dealing with stress during the holidays.
- Stick to your daily routine.
- Bundle up and go for a walk to see your neighborhood's Christmas decor.
- Get the right amount of sleep (six to eight hours).
- Laugh... it makes you feel good!

SOURCES: APA.org, WebMD, Mayo Clinic, American Heart Association, Health.com