



Holiday Stress

Ask anyone with in-laws, children, pets, a significant other, friends, family, co-workers, or any other people in their lives about a time when that person or animal caused them stress and you will hear some of the craziest stories.

In our 'go-go-go' society the holidays bring a whole new set of stressors. Preparing food, buying gifts, cleaning, family events, and children being home from school... it can all get a little overwhelming. Holiday stress is extremely common in our society. In fact, a recent survey reports that 44% of women and 31% of men report an increase in stress during the holiday season.

Even people who do not admit to being stressed can have physical symptoms caused by stress. Some possible symptoms of stress include: muscle

aches, headaches, loss of sleep/sleeping too much, upset stomach, changes in appetite, and



feelings of sadness/nervousness. But, stress doesn't always have to be a bad thing. There are two types of stress eustress and distress. Eustress is good stress, happy occasions such as the birth of a child or a wedding can cause stress which can be taxing

on the body but ultimately should leave a person with positive feelings. Distress is the negative stress we experience during a tragedy.

Everyone will have some stress in their lives at one point or another; it is how we handle that stress that can be either positive or negative influences on our physical and mental health. For some people stress can be so overwhelming that they will turn to substance abuse for relief. Using substance such as alcohol, narcotics, or even tobacco to relieve stress will actually increase the amount of stress we place on our bodies. Stress has to come from something, someone, or somewhere, using substances does not address the cause of stress and does nothing to solve the problems that cause the stress. Substances actually create a more stressful environment.

Managing Stress

Surveys show that 41% of people will turn to food to alleviate holiday stress, while 28% will drink alcohol to deal with stress.



Using substance cannot solve problems; they give people a false sense of stress relief. Alcohol, pain killers, tobacco all mask stress and do nothing to resolve why people are stressed.

Tobacco, for example, is a stimulant to our body systems. While many tobacco smokers will say that smoking is relaxing they are actually creating a very stressful internal environment. Nicotine causes increased heart rate and blood pressure that adds to physical stress on our bodies. The calm smokers feel comes from taking a break from their stressors and spending a few minutes taking deep breaths. Non-smokers have an

added benefit of a break, when a non-smoker takes a break from their stressors to take a few deep breaths and relax, they are not creating the internal stress that tobacco causes and they don't have any addiction receptors in the brain to feed, they can focus on just relaxing.

The best ways to handle stress include: get enough sleep at night, set aside time for exercise, eat healthy foods, laugh, avoid abusing substances, and take a break (10-15 minutes for yourself can do wonders). Don't let the stress of the holidays ruin your opportunity to enjoy them.

Special thanks to Nate Hill for his help with this article.

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor	M-139 Office	Niles	Three Oaks
769 Pipestone	2106 S. M-139	1205 N. Front St.	21 N. Elm
P.O. Box 706	927-5623	684-2800	756-2008
926-7121			

Or visit us on the web at www.bchdmi.org

Berrien County Health

Department:
Preventing Disease,
Prolonging Life and
Protecting the
Health of the
Community.



December is Healthy Habits Month

December is Healthy Habits month, and the health department will have articles covering holiday stress, exercise, healthy eating, alcohol awareness, and New Years resolutions. For more information about any of these topics, **please call the Health Department at 926-7121.**

Holiday Stress Management Tips:

- Acknowledge your feelings— you don't have to pretend to be happy
- Seek support— ask friends and family to help with overwhelming tasks
- Be realistic— accept that families and traditions change with time
- Set differences aside— try to accept family for what they are
- Stick to a budget— don't spend more than you can afford on gifts!
- Plan ahead— prevent stressful last minute scrambling
- Learn to say no— don't overwhelm yourself with commitments
- Don't abandon healthy habits— don't let the holidays be an excuse
- Take a breather— be sure to find some time for yourself
- Rethink resolutions— don't set yourself up for failure with unrealistic resolutions
- Forget about perfection— things will probably go wrong, and that's ok!
- Seek professional help if you need it— if you continue to feel sad or anxious for several weeks, consult a professional.

For more information, call the health department at:

926-7121

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