

Tips for Dealing with Stress and Depression During the Holidays

by Tracy Bonczyk

For many individuals the holidays spark a cascade of stress and depression. Suddenly, they find themselves faced with a multitude of demands. There is shopping to do, dinners to prepare, goodies to bake and parties to attend.

Scientific research has shown most holiday stress and depression are the result of three main triggers -- relationships, finances and physical demands. Let's briefly review each of these triggers.

While many of us look forward to family gatherings during the holidays, for others it is a time of intense conflict and turmoil. Communication breakdowns occur when family members are thrust together for an extended period of time. Oftentimes, alcohol is involved which can lead to arguments and physical altercations.

On the flip side, there are many people who face the holidays alone. Oftentimes this leads to depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and other stress related disorders.

Finances can cause stress any time; however, during the holidays there is additional pressure to spend, spend, spend. Everyone wants to buy gifts that will delight their friends and family, but for many people it comes with a very high price tag -- overwhelming stress and depression.

Last, but not least, the physical demands of the holidays is enough to exhaust a professional athlete. The marathon of shopping sprees, social gatherings and preparation of holiday meals can wear you out. Feeling exhausted increases your stress, which lowers your immunity and leaves you more vulnerable to illness. It's a vicious cycle.

When you're exhausted and stressed out, it's hard to stop and regroup. However, the following tips can help you take time out to reassess the situation and prevent stress and depression from taking away your holiday joy.

Plan ahead. Many people procrastinate until the last minute. Then they hustle and bustle trying to accomplish everything in one day. Doing this causes a tremendous amount of stress that can be avoided by simply planning ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities.

Just say NO. If you learn how to say no to projects and activities that require too much time or do not correspond to

your schedule, you'll find you can significantly reduce your stress level. During the holidays say yes only to activities and projects you really want to do. Doing so can help you avoid feeling resentful and overwhelmed.

Create a budget. Holiday shopping frequently leads to overspending. People get caught up in the holiday sales and spend more than they planned. This can lead to months of anxiety and stress as they attempt to recover from the financial setback. Before you go shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Make a list of people you need to buy gifts for and how much you want to spend on each person. Then stick to your budget.

Watch what you eat. It's very easy to overindulge during the holidays. Before heading out to holiday parties, eat a healthy snack so you don't go overboard. Some indulgence is okay, but overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.

Acknowledge your feelings. The holidays can be particularly difficult for people who have recently lost a loved one or for those who aren't near their family and friends. If you find yourself feeling sad or grieving, realize these are normal feelings. It's alright to express your feelings or cry. It's unrealistic to expect yourself to be happy simply because it's the holiday season.

Take time for yourself. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the holidays. However, if you don't take time for yourself, you'll quickly get burnt out and stressed out. Give yourself the gift of "alone" time. Fifteen minutes of solitude, without any distractions, may rejuvenate you enough to handle the tasks at hand. Take a walk, listen to calming music, or meditate.

Tracy Bonczyk, Board Certified Master Hypnotist, Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist and founder of MiniMeditations.com, offers simple, yet effective 15- and 30-minute meditation CDs. Quickly reduce your stress level with "Relaxation Vacation" or "Today is Going to Go Perfectly." To learn more visit www.Minimeditations.com

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What is Diabetes?

by M. Scott Stanley, MS

Diabetes is a serious disease in which the body does not produce enough insulin, or does not use insulin properly. Insulin is extremely important in the process of turning the food you eat into energy your body can use. It is estimated that 20.8 million people, or 7% of the general population, have diabetes. This number has grown from 5.6 million people in 1980, and is expected to continue to rise.

Type I diabetes is most commonly diagnosed in childhood or early adulthood, and is characterized by high blood sugar levels and an inability to produce insulin. Type II diabetes, the most common form accounting for 90-95% of all diagnosed cases, is typically diagnosed in adulthood, and is characterized by an inability to use insulin properly (insulin resistance), resulting in high blood sugar levels and a gradual inability to produce insulin all-together. Gestational diabetes is a special type that can occur during pregnancy. Diabetes is a serious disease that can lead to complications such as heart disease, stroke, blindness, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, kidney disease, nerve damage, and amputation.

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The following are the most common symptoms associated with diabetes, although many or none of these may exist. If you are concerned, please see your doctor, as there are tests that can be run to give you a quick, definitive answer.

- » Extreme hunger
- » Excessive thirst
- » Frequent urination
- » Irritability
- » Increased fatigue or tiredness
- » Unexplained weight loss
- » Sudden vision changes
- » Very dry skin
- » More infections than usual
- » Sores that are slow to heal
- » Tingling or numbness in the hands or feet

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Type I: There is no known way to prevent type I diabetes. Its cause is typically genetic, autoimmune, or environmental.

Type II: Although there is no guarantee, there are steps that you can take to greatly decrease your chances of developing this form of diabetes:

- » Get 20-30 minutes of moderate-to-intense physical activity at least 3-5 days per week.
- » Eat a diet high in fruits and vegetables, dietary fiber and whole grains, and low in total fat, trans fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and processed/refined sugars such as that found in cookies, candy bars, cakes, etc.
- » Obtain and maintain a healthy bodyweight. Being overweight or obese is one of the greatest risk factors.
- » Speak with your physician about your risk factors and obtaining a yearly fasting blood glucose test.
- » Know your family history, as the disease can be hereditary.

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It is very important for diabetics to follow their doctors' instructions. However, the following is a list of basic self-management tips to discuss with your doctor:

- » Know your body well, specifically when your sugar is up or down.
- » Make sure those around you know what to do in the case of an emergency.
- » Use insulin and take other medications as directed.
- » Eat a healthy diet and exercise as directed.
- » Check your blood glucose as directed.
- » Keep a log of all of your blood sugar levels to share with your doctor.
- » Check ketone levels as directed and obtain periodic A1C tests.
- » See your doctor 1-2 times per year for a general check up, or as directed.
- » See your doctor if you are having trouble controlling your blood glucose, or if you are not feeling well.
- » Practice appropriate foot care and have your feet checked as directed.
- » Have your eyes checked regularly as directed.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
American Diabetes Association (ADA)