



# Stress Strategies for the Holidays

The holidays—a time of festivity, parties, shopping, entertaining, religious observances, family gatherings, decorating and...stress! With all the extra demands we place on ourselves and expectations of the season, is it any wonder that most of us feel some stress during the holiday season? The source of holiday stress is simple: When it comes to time, money and social and family commitments, most people try to do too much. Here are some strategies for making your holidays a time of renewal.

## Set Priorities

People tend to overextend themselves during the holidays. It's not necessary to attend every party and religious celebration that comes along. When allotting your limited time, choose quality over quantity. Decide what activities you and your family would most enjoy doing and focus on those. Share responsibilities for cooking and baking with others. Learn to say "no" gently but firmly to social events that are over your limit.

## Plan Ahead

Nothing creates more holiday stress than last-minute shopping and preparations. Take charge of your holidays in advance by making lists of things to do and setting aside some time each day for them. Consider setting a cutoff date; after that date, things that haven't gotten done will be deferred until next year.

## Keep It Simple

A holiday feast doesn't have to be elaborate to be wonderful. Often traditional fare is appreciated most, with guests

providing some of the dishes. When shopping, take advantage of gift-wrapping services. Try shopping at home from mail order catalogs. Let someone else compete for the "most fabulous holiday preparations" award.

## Stay in Budget

Do holiday preparations strain your budget? Learn to say no to expensive holiday ideas. Choose simple, thoughtful or useful gifts over elaborate, expensive surprises. How can you enjoy the holidays if you're worried about paying your bills?

## Riding the Emotional Roller Coaster

The holidays are hard on your emotions. The holidays of your childhood may take on a magical glow that's often impossible to recover in adulthood. While the radios and department stores are blaring messages of peace and joy, you're dreading the family gathering that always leads to someone not speaking to someone else. If family gatherings are stressful, avoid long visits, either in your house or away. Defer settling family arguments until some other time. Be willing to let go of old traditions if they no longer work for your family and find new ones that do.

## Take Care of Yourself

Counter the holiday pressures by giving yourself some time for rest and renewal each day. Avoid overindulgence in holiday food, alcohol and caffeine. Think about what the holidays are actually celebrating and try to stay true to that spirit. Peace and joy can be more than just a department store come-on.

