

Managing Holiday Stress

by Margery Silverton, LCSW-C
Certified Imago Relationship Therapist

I recently gave a presentation at the new Lifestyle Center of Annapolis on "Emotional Fitness" for the holidays. I asked the folks attending, "Is there anyone here who is totally and unambivalently in love with the holiday season?" Not one of the 30 people there raised a hand. One said, "Those people aren't here. They're shopping at the mall." All joking aside, there's no question that the holidays are an intense time when days get compressed, large sums of money gets spent, sleep gets lost just when we need it most, exercise routines get by-passed, and sugar gets consumed at rates unprecedented in human history. No wonder we tend to feel just a bit jittery during this season.

On the other hand, when we're able to "get in the spirit," the holidays offer us an opportunity to connect in deep and profound ways with the people, memories, and values we most treasure. Here are some ideas for how to minimize the stresses involved and maximize the pleasures of the holiday season:

- Keep your energy up by practicing good nutrition and taking supplements.
 - Before a holiday party, eat a small protein based snack so you're not too hungry when you get there. I usually have a small protein shake.
 - Shop the perimeter of the grocery store. That's where the healthiest foods are. The processed foods in the center of the store cause additional stress on the body.
- Be aware that old unresolved family issues tend to resurface around the holidays. This is when ruptures between family members are the most painful. If you're dealing with this issue, decide ahead of time how you want to minimize the distress, and what rituals and personal connections help you feel most spiritually alive. If you have to spend time with a family member who is a source of conflict for you, keep the contact limited.
- Set good boundaries on the number of commitments you make. None of us can do "everything for every body." Asking these questions will help focus your energy:
 - How do I most deeply want to spend the holiday?
 - What am I willing to do to keep the family harmony?
 - What am I no longer willing to do?
- Get enough sleep. Winter is a time for slowing down and reflection, not staying up to all hours wrapping gifts and baking cookies. Don't rob yourself of sleep or your family will feel the consequences.
- Consciously decide what values you want to honor and what rituals help you express those values. Giving and receiving, visiting the sick, hospitality, friendship, community service, religious freedom, are just a few of the values honored at this time of year.



May you all have a meaningful, beautiful, and healthy holiday season!