



Managing **STRESS** this *Holiday Season*

Americans are, in general, stressed out and the holidays just put the icing on the cake. According to the American Medical Association, stress is a factor in more than 75% of sickness today. Also, according to the World Health Organization, stress is America's #1 Health Problem.

How do we reduce stress-levels? First, you must make reducing your stress a priority which means finding time to manage it. Consider this:

"If we do not make time for health we'll have to make time for sickness."

Marilu Henner

How is stress affecting you?

Some people have physical symptoms such as headaches, back pain, heart disease, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, decreased immunity, stomach upset or sleep problems. Others experience anxiety, restlessness, irritability, depression, anger lack of focus or burnout. Stress can also affect behavior causing overeating, angry outbursts, drug or alcohol abuse, social withdrawal, crying spells or relationship conflicts. If you think about it, most of these physical symptoms, feelings and behaviors will just cause more problems and more stress and lead into a downward spiral. Yikes! How do we put on the brakes? Put on the brakes by taking a break. Here's my favorite new quote:

"The time to relax is when you don't have time for it."

Author Unknown

Ways to reduce stress

Got 5 minutes? Find a quiet place (even your parked car) where you can close your eyes and breathe. Try progressive muscle relaxation. In this relaxation technique, you focus on tension and relaxation. Start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes and progressively working your way up to your neck and head. Tense each muscle group for five to ten seconds and then relax and move on to the next muscle group. Most people hold a lot of tension in their upper back, neck, jaw and face. You may not even realize that you are tense in those areas until you try this technique. Imagine letting the tension "melt away"...this really works great.

Got 10 minutes? Exercise. You just knew I was going to say that didn't you? It doesn't take as much time as you may think. Even a brisk 10 minute walk can help to clear your mind. Physical activity increases the production of endorphins, your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters.

Got 20-60 minutes? Longer bouts of exercise (if squeezing them in does not stress out your schedule) are highly recommended. Cardiovascular exercises such as walking, running, cycling and swimming will all give you some "me time" which is great for sifting through your list and solving a problem or two. Another suggestion: relax, breathe and get re-focused with yoga or tai chi. Do you need to get totally distracted? Try a playing a sport or attending a choreographed exercise class which will keep you focused on the activity at hand with no chance to dwell on your problems.

Put things into perspective I love the question: "Will this matter 5 years from now?" Some things will, but a lot of things won't. Try to identify them. Follow this well-known advice:

"Don't sweat the small stuff... and it's all small stuff."

Richard Carlson

Yours in Health & Fitness, *Karin*

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