

HOW TO REDUCE YOUR STRESS AT CHRISTMAS

The demands of this time of the year can take a toll on both mind and body. For many people Christmas is not the happy, joyous time that is often portrayed in the media. The following suggestions are not new, but sometimes we can all benefit from a reminder of reducing our stress by taking to look after ourselves as well as those we care about.

1. Be generous, but sensible. This is the time of year when the need to please others can take over from sensible thinking. Credit cards get maxed out and personal debt mounts. Reduce your financial stress by tempering your generosity with common sense. Watch your finances and spend only what you can afford.
2. Keep in mind what's important. For most people, Christmas and the holiday period is really about taking the time to appreciate the people closest to them. Consider skipping some parties or events to catch up with those important to you. If visiting the in-laws for Christmas dinner makes you tense, take a deep breath and consider the meaning it has for your partner and children. Make that meaning part of your happiness.
3. Avoid excess. Needless to say, this time of year brings an excess of food and drink. Pace yourself and say, "no." to the second helping or extra drink. You'll feel much better the next day when you do.
4. Take time to exercise. Take a walk with the dog, or go for a jog four or five times each week over the holiday period. You'll get a range of benefits, including a boost from the body's mood-lifting chemicals and some quality time to yourself.
5. Get enough sleep. Lack of sleep is sure to increase your stress and fatigue. Resolve to have a bedtime which gives you the amount of sleep you need. If you're tired, don't be afraid to leave the party or Christmas gathering earlier than planned and don't fool yourself by saying to others that you're fine on only 3 or 4 hours sleep.
6. Don't let travel get the better of you. Christmas is often a time when many people travel. If you're travelling by car, plan ahead, ensure the kids are entertained, take breaks and drive safely. You may be an experienced driver, but a lot of other road users are not. If you're taking a plane, this is a time when delays are common. Have a good book, iPad or some other device to help you pass the time. Getting upset or stressed has never speeded up the departure time.
7. When families all come together, people sometimes say and do a range of inappropriate things. If possible, resist the urge to take offence. Keep things in perspective. This can be an important part of reducing stress. Don't expect miracles or dramatic change just because it's Christmas. If you and certain family members grate on each other, you can be sure there'll be tension at the family gatherings. Avoid the triggers that tend to set off disagreements. For example, if politics is a touchy subject in your family, don't discuss it. If someone brings up the topic, change the subject and move on to something else to talk about. Encourage the family members to get involved in after-lunch activities, such as cricket on the back lawn. Involving the kids and having fun means it's less likely to be a conversation which can develop into arguments. You could also plan something to do as a group after lunch, if necessary.



If the demands of work or shift rosters result in you or a family member missing at Christmas, plan a time prior to Christmas when everyone can be together for a meal or special gathering. This can be followed with phone calls on Christmas Day, or a Skype session.

People have different expectations around Christmas. If there's a potential for conflict or misunderstanding in the family, consider ways to head off problems early. Some people want everyone to get together for Christmas, while others prefer their own small gathering. Split and blended families can present some unique difficulties. Talking about things early can head off most people from being upset because their expectations were not met.

Christmas can be a time of stress. Don't let it get to you. If you find yourself starting to "lose it", or when you feel frustration building, take a quick break. Step away. Go outside for a walk, play some music or call a friend. Taking five minutes to clear your mind can improve your perspective and flexibility.

This material is produced by Michael Tunnecliffe and Kerryn Ashford-Hatherly (Ashcliffe Psychology). While written in good faith and to acceptable professional standards, these resource sheets are not a substitute for direct professional advice, which should be sought regarding all matters of concern or risk to an individual. Phone: 0455 455 855.