

December 2008

Kindred *Spirits*

Stress busters

Plan to enjoy the holidays

The reason for the season

Don't dread the holiday shopping, the wrapping, the cooking and the cleaning. Do your best to match your expectations to your abilities. Remember why you are doing these things and keep a positive attitude. Listen to music, laugh and enjoy your family. Snuggle up and read a good book, take a walk, breathe the scents of the season, enjoy a healthy snack and get your sleep. You'll make positive memories with less stress.

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The holidays are a time for great joy for some, and a time of stress and frustration for others. "Our ideal image of a beautifully decorated house, with the family getting along, plenty of money to purchase gifts and ample time to decorate gingerbread houses rarely matches the reality of the holiday season," says Lisa Wallace, University of Missouri Extension human development specialist.

She offers techniques to alleviate stress during the holidays:

1. Plan ahead. The holidays require time for special preparations in addition to your regular responsibilities. Trying to complete last-minute tasks can create an atmosphere of crisis management and stress. The solution is to schedule holiday tasks and events with more care.
2. Consider changing tradition. If you have always prepared the entire holiday meal, try asking everyone to bring a dish this year. This gives you a break and others a chance to be a part of the celebration. If family members purchase gifts for each other, consider drawing names to save money and reduce shopping time.
3. Delegate tasks. Enlist the

cooperation of family members to share the shopping, cooking and cleaning responsibilities. If you have the money, consider hiring someone to bake the pies or clean the house. This provides them with income and helps with your workload.

4. Get enough sleep. Each of us requires a different level of sleep to feel rested. Without enough sleep, we get irritable, adding to the stress. During the busy holidays, take the time for adequate sleep so you have the energy to enjoy family and friends.
5. Remember moderation of food and drink. The holidays are a time when it is easy to overindulge in what we eat and drink. Consider setting a goal of moderation: one piece of fudge at the party or one cookie in the office break room. Try eating veggies before the open house so you'll eat less at the goodie table.
6. Set a budget and stick to it. We want to be generous and when shopping, it is easy to fall prey to impulse buying and over-use of credit cards. This leads to the stress of post-holiday blues when the bills arrive in January. Rationally plan what you will spend before you go shopping.

Celebrate with healthier eating

10 ideas for reducing sugar, fat and salt in recipes

Eat healthier this holiday season by making a few simple modifications to reduce the fat, sugar and sodium in recipes. “You can still enjoy your favorite holiday foods without the guilt and know you are providing your family with healthier and more nutritious alternatives,” says Karen Elliott, University of Missouri Extension nutrition specialist.

- Cut fat and sugar by one-fourth to one-third in baked products and desserts.
- Replace half or all of the fat in

baked products with applesauce or other pureed fruit.

- Use 1 percent low-fat or skim milk. Substitute evaporated skim milk for regular evaporated milk or cream.
- Choose cooking techniques that don’t add additional fat. Use a non-stick skillet with non-stick cooking spray for a low-fat cooking technique.
- Add a small amount of vanilla, cinnamon or nutmeg to sweeten baked products when you reduce sugars.
- Leave salt out of most recipes.
- Try fruit juice, low sodium broth

or wine to cook meat.

- Use onion and garlic powder rather than onion salt, garlic salt or other seasoned salts. Start with about half as much powder as of the salt.
- Choose whole grain ingredients rather than refined products. Whole wheat flour can be substituted for up to half the white flour in baking.
- Add extra fruits and vegetables to recipes, including the peel when possible.

“Rather than making food the priority during the holidays, focus on socializing with family members and friends,” says Elliott.

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Holiday stability for kids

For children, holidays can be a joyful time filled with fun and learning experiences. However, they can also be tense, unhappy times, says Dr. Nina Chen, University of Missouri Extension human development specialist.

Keep in mind that young children need a regular schedule. Mealtime, naps and bedtime should be consistent. Often, children have an unstable schedule during holidays, which may make them feel tired, frustrated or overwhelmed. If you need to do shopping at the last minute, leave your children at home with a familiar person.

Very young children have difficulty understanding time concepts. Minimize preparations until a few days before the holiday. Children who have been counting a month, day by day, will be frantic when the last day arrives.

Remember, planning in advance to ensure stability is the most effective method to enjoy the coming holidays.