According to the famous Holmes stress research, Christmas is stressful with a rating scale of 12. The stress levels can increase dramatically, if you have recently lost a loved one. The highest stress rating scale is 100 for death of a spouse or 73 for divorce.

All of us have an idea of how we want to recreate the holidays with harmony and joy. Sometimes sibling rivalry and grudges come to the surface during stressful times. For family get-togethers:

- **Start with a positive attitude.** Look at the holidays as a time to catch up with relatives and old friends. Remind yourself that you as an adult do not have to compete for affection. Grandmas and Grandpas just need time and togetherness to love all grandchildren.

- **Togetherness can be awkward.** Avoid criticism and do not bring up any difficult topics.

- **Be realistic.** Talk with family and friends about your plans for the holidays. Grandparents will appreciate thoughts on decorations, gifts, and family dinners.

**Healing Rituals for Holiday Grief**

Holidays without your loved one can be painful and lonely. Get your closest friends or family together and create a ritual to remember your loved one during the holidays. You can also create your own.

1. Write a letter to your loved one, gift-wrap it in a box and put it under the tree or on a table.

2. Have an evening gathering at the gravesite, tell your friends and family to bring a candle, story, poem, or song to share. Put a large lit candle in the center of your group. As each person tells their story, reads their poem, or sings their song, have them light their candle from the large candle. End ritual by saying, “You are loved, missed, etc.” Blow out the candles when you are ready.

3. At the dinner table at the holidays, ask everyone to close their eyes, and say the name of the loved one and names of people your guests have lost. Say a prayer or just nod your head.

4. Buy or make a card for your loved one, sharing your feelings at each of the holidays. Put the cards aside in a special box.

(continued on the back page)
As we approach Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, New Years, Super Bowl Sunday and all the meals and parties associated with these holidays, food safety has to be a part of the planning the foods and drinks. The ability to prepare, store and serve foods safely should be considered. Having other people attending bring some of the dishes will help with the storage situation and cooking limitations.

It is always good to be able to prepare foods ahead for holiday celebrations, but the ability to keep foods safe until serving time has to be considered when the menu is planned. For most of us having the space to thaw the turkey in the refrigerator or store other meats like a ham, limits the cold storage space left for other foods. This may mean we can not prepare many other foods that need refrigeration in advance. For some foods utilizing an ice chest for a day or two may help as long as the temperature is kept very cold.

The ingredients for side dishes may be partially prepared, but not assembled until close to cooking time. Chopping and dicing fruits or vegetables for stuffing, salad, casseroles or other dishes can be time consuming and make a last minute mess. If this chore can be done a day or two ahead, they can be stored in plastic bags and take up much less room than an assembled casserole in the refrigerator. The dry ingredients for these dishes can also be premeasured for quicker assembling at the last minute.

The foods we usually think of as being critical for temperature control are meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dressing, gravy, cream pies, pudding and dishes made with these foods. Other foods that need to be kept at a safe temperature are pies, pastries or cakes with cream cheese, cream, custard or soft meringue fillings or icings. Dips made with sour cream, yogurt, cottage cheese or cream cheese also are perishable. These foods need to be kept refrigerated until serving. Avoid dishes with raw or undercooked eggs.

Including too many of these dishes in the same event may lead to unsafe conditions. Unless it is a family tradition, choose desserts or appetizers that do not need refrigeration when space is limited.

Foods that are perishable need to be kept above 160° or below 40°F to be safe. The maximum time out of this temperature range is two hours. Using chafing dishes, crock pots or other heating sources can help keep hot foods in the safe temperature zones. Putting food dishes on ice can help keep cold foods safe. If these are not options, serve foods in small containers and change foods after two hours. Discard foods left at room temperature after two hours. After fresh fruits and vegetables are cut, they should be treated as perishable foods also.

Another concern with holiday cooking is the preparation of large quantities of foods. When cooking large quantities of foods that are to be refrigerated before eating, quickly cool and refrigerate the food. This might be done by sitting a pot of soup or chili in ice water in the sink, and stirring to cool the food down more quickly, or divide the food into smaller portions and immediately refrigerate in covered shallow containers. Deep or large containers keep food warm longer and encourage bacterial growth. A large container might take all night to get cooled down to a safe temperature that prevents bacterial growth.

Leftovers are another special concern with holiday foods. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly. Reheat foods to at least 165°F.

Thaw raw meats on the lowest shelf in the refrigerator with a pan under it to prevent drippings from coming in contact with other foods. Raw meat juices that get on foods that are not cooked can cause serious illness.

Have a safe and wonderful holiday season!
Using Fresh Greens For Holiday Decorations  
Donna Aufdenberg

The Holidays are fast approaching and before you know it, you’ll be dragging out all those old Christmas decorations. Why not try using some fresh greenery this season for decorating? Decorating the home with fresh greenery is one of the oldest holiday traditions. They were used to represent everlasting life and hope for the return of spring.

Many evergreen plants from our landscapes can be used indoors as well as outdoors during the holiday season. Trimmings from your yard will be fresher than those you can buy from tree stands or retailers. Some people even get more joy from being able to cut and use trimmings themselves.

Some of the easiest evergreens that you can use indoors are fir, pine, cedar and holly while specimens that do better outdoors include hemlock, spruce and broadleaf evergreens. Ivy can be used but wilts fast if not stuck in water. Other plants that can be used for greenery include: arborvitae, privet, viburnum, Leyland cypress, nandina, barberry, Oregon grape-holly, yew and boxwood.

To dress up greenery, consider using other plant parts. For accenting your greenery, you might consider berries, dried flowers, dried herbs, seed pods, cones, and nuts. Some more common items might be bittersweet, holly berries, magnolia pods, mistletoe, pyracantha, rose hips, sweet gum balls, and pine cones.

When taking greenery or stems, remember this will prune your landscape plants so cut them in a way that will preserve the look and shape of the plant. The greenery and stems can be used for wreaths, swags, garland, bouquets and for accents for other holiday decorations. Just avoid harvesting too much greenery from one particular plant. To help prolong freshness, there are sprays on the market that minimize moisture loss from cut greenery.

It is important to keep in mind that dried evergreens can become flammable. Make sure that any wreath, roping, and garland that you bring indoors is as fresh as possible. Check the greenery regularly for freshness. If the greenery is becoming dry, replace or remove the dry portions. Avoid placing fresh greenery near heat sources such as heaters, heat vents, candles or fireplaces. If you use lights in your fresh arrangements indoors, make sure they stay cool, and if outside, that they are rated for exterior use.

Keep in mind that some of the popular plants used for greenery can present a poisoning hazard for small children and pets. Poisonous berries can be found on holly plants, yews, mistletoe, ivy plants and bittersweet. Keep all these plants out of the reach of children and pets.

The most common uses of fresh greenery are wreathes, swags, balls, garlands and table arrangements. Other decorative ideas include:

- Pine cones can be hung by decorative ribbon as ornaments or decorations.
- Berry sprigs can be added to old or existing centerpieces for adding a refreshing splash of color.
- Add dried herbs such as rosemary or lavender into decorative arrangements for a heavenly scent.

Tips For Keeping Greenery Fresh

- Use clean, sharp cutters to cut branches and immediately put cut ends into water until ready to use.
- Crush the ends of woody stems to allow the cutting to take in more water.
- Immerse greenery in water overnight before arranging.
- Allow the foliage to dry and then spray it with an anti-transpirant, such as Wilt-pruf, to help seal in moisture.
- Keep completed wreaths, garlands and arrangements in a cool location until use.
- Plan to replace greenery and fruits throughout the holiday season if they become less than fresh.

Taken from Holiday Decorating with Fresh Greenery Guide HGIC 1753 Clemson University Extension
Simplify Holiday Gift-Giving

In this difficult economic times everyone will be thankful to end expensive gift giving. I still have Christmas ornaments and cards that my children made for me at school. When I get them out at tree trimming time, I enjoy warm thoughts and feelings.

Continue rituals like drawing names and giving gifts only to children. Some families give one gift per household. Most families put limits on cost of gifts and stick to those limits.

Time is a true gift of love. Baking cookies, reading books, and just spending time together are treasures. What about working at a community meal for the less fortunate or contributing toys or clothes to charity?

Honor old rituals during the holidays. Let everyone choose or cook their favorite dish. One of the best way to make you feel better is to do something for someone else. Volunteers are always welcome.

Stay Strong Stay Healthy Program
Strength and exercise training
Monday, January 9, 2012
Required Screening Starts 9:00 a.m.
Tuesday, January 17, 2012
Monday, January 23, 2012
Monday, January 30, 2012
Monday, February 6, 2012
Monday, February 13, 2012
Tuesday, February 21, 2012
Monday, February 27, 2012
Monday, March 5, 2012
Monday, March 12, 2012
All above sessions: 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Cost: $20.00 Call the Cape Girardeau County Extension Office for additional information. 573-243-3581
Space is limited-Register Early by 01/03/12

Source: WFL December 2010 www.workfamilylife.com
www.bobbiemel.com