



Holiday Stress, and how to overcome it!

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Most of us visualize the holidays fondly -- at least when they're pretty far in the past or future. Past holidays are usually remembered for their most joyful moments, future holidays are imagined as islands of uninterrupted bliss.

Maybe this is good -- whether as an example of human optimism or precision selective memory -- but the reality of the Holiday Season is often somewhat different.

As NLP life coaches the single word we most often hear associated with the holidays is "stress".

Of course, stress happens year-round. The typical triggers -- deadlines, conflict, traffic jams and job and money worries, to name a few -- are never in short supply in modern life.

But the holidays add an additional layer of stressors.

Add the desire to give gifts -- or the expectation of gifts being given -- to money worries. Add holiday shoppers to existing traffic jams and crowded stores. Add end-of-the-year deadlines -- and missing and shortened work days -- to normal job pressures.

The key to enjoying the emotional bounty of the holidays is recognizing stress and learning how to manage your response to pressure.

Stress is an aspect of the "fight-or-flight" response that is part of the makeup of virtually all animals -- another name for fight-or-flight is "acute stress response".

As a practical matter, most of us experience stress as feelings of tension, fear or pressure.



Physically, stress causes your heart to race and your muscles to tighten, and you become pumped up, ready for anything. This "red alert" response is deeply programmed into the human psyche, and is very useful during emergencies when we need to act fast -- like to escape a lion.

But modern life is quite different from what our evolutionary ancestors experienced. Simply put: in ancient times there usually was no lion -- stress events were relatively unusual, and transient.

Modern life, on the other hand, is full of stress-triggers. When you're stuck in traffic, sitting in an endless meeting, waiting in a slow moving line buying gifts or lying in bed fretting over finances or work deadlines, your racing thoughts are simply stressful -- and the opposite of "useful".

Trouble is, your mind and body weren't designed to tolerate high levels of stress for long periods, and living in a prolonged state of "red alert" can leave you feeling burned out and make you more vulnerable to illness.

How can we overcome feelings of stress at the holidays? The first step is recognizing that you're stressing as early as possible. Here are 14 early warning signs that can help you take steps to control stress before it controls you.

14 signals of stress

- Restlessness and anxiety
- Inability to concentrate
- Trouble falling asleep



- Nightmares
- Persistent fatigue
- Depression
- Lack of appetite or overeating
- Indigestion
- Teeth grinding
- Tension headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Muscle spasms
- Persistent backache
- Trembling or shaking

What can you do to overcome feelings of stress? Lots!

As NLP Life Coaches we work with clients year-round on issues related to stress, and know that everyone has within themselves marvelous tools that relieve stress. Here are our top-twenty stress reduction tips.

20 tools to manage stress

- **Sleep well.** Lack of sleep decreases your ability to handle stress. Target: Try to get 7 – 8 hours of sleep per night. If sleep problems persist, talk to your health care provider.



- **Move more.** Regular exercise not only releases tense muscles, it also relaxes your mind. Try a brisk walk, exercise class or bike ride.
- **Eat healthy.** Small, light meals eaten throughout the day can provide steady energy and blood sugar levels, which may make handling stressful situations easier.
- **Plan ahead.** When you know that a stressful event is approaching, prepare for it in advance. Plan your coping strategies, line up your support network, get prepared and rehearse.
- **Cut back on caffeine.** Caffeine works on the body much like stress, raising heart rate and blood pressure, and revving up the body and mind. Better: Drink more water instead of caffeinated beverages during stressful times.
- **Relax your body.** Once a day, tense and then slowly relax each muscle group, from head to your toes.
- **Relax your mind.** Take a mental time-out for 15-20 minutes daily. Action: Meditate, daydream or listen to music – whatever is best for you.
- **Take an imaginary vacation.** Close your eyes and picture a quiet scene ... on a mountain... in a meadow ... by the ocean. Imagine yourself relaxing in your ideal location.
- **Maximize your energy.** Schedule your most difficult work for when you're rested and alert. Tackle easier tasks when energy is low.
- **Get involved.** Being with and helping others keeps you from blowing your own problems out of proportion. Ideas: Join a committee or group, or volunteer.



- **Avoid rushing.** Leave earlier to arrive on time for meetings and other commitments.
- **Stop procrastinating.** Make a list every day of the top five tasks you need to complete, and focus on them when energy is high.
- **Talk it out.** Use your personal support system – family, friends, co-workers or a mental health counselor – to help find solutions.
- **Blow off steam.** Release anger and tension in healthy ways. Go for a jog, write down your worries or try a new hobby.
- **Breathe out stress.** Feeling tense? Stop, take a deep breath and exhale slowly.
- **Laugh.** It's a great way to release stress, and it gives your heart and lungs a mini aerobic workout.
- **Change negative self-talk.** Reverse “I can't do anything right” to “I have what it takes to get the job done.”
- **Spoil yourself.** See a play, get a massage or call an old friend.
- **Be thankful.** At the end of each day, list the good things that happened. You'll be surprised at how much went right – a gratitude journal.
- **Accept change.** Consider it as a natural state that offers opportunity.

We hope that you have a wonderful holiday season and if you do start feeling stressed, we're always here to help!

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