

## Enjoy a Stress Free Holiday Season

You might be surprised to learn that stress can be a good thing. Stress is what gets our adrenaline pumping and gives us our get-up-and-go for public speaking, performance of any kind, and taking tests. Without a certain amount of stress and adrenaline, life might be pretty boring. However, there is a point at which too much stress has the opposite effect and we need a break.

The holidays should not be one of those times but all too often, it is. “Stress free” and “holiday” might seem like oxymorons to most people, but it is possible to have both. Here are some suggestions to get you thinking about how to make this season as enjoyable as possible for everyone.

It is important to have realistic expectations and to define for yourself what “good enough” looks like. Are you dead set on making turkey with all the trimmings when half of your guests are vegetarians? You might be setting yourself up for frustration and disappointment. And a lot of leftovers. Would it be easier for you to have cold cuts and sandwich fixings and finger foods available for people throughout the day, instead of cooking? Then do it!

You might be thinking, if I don't do THIS (cook, bake, wrap, shop), what will happen? What are the consequences? Will you be disappointed? Will others be disappointed? Only you can weigh the pros and cons of these options and determine for yourself what you can and can't live with. Can you live with the disappointment of your children if you only bake two types of Christmas cookies instead of three? You can?! Great – enjoy yourself!

Other ideas might include cutting back on the gift list, scale back on décor, plan ahead, and delegate. Many families are opting for the gift of “experience” instead of “things” placed under a tree. Go skiing as a group, visit a light display, stay overnight at an indoor water park, go caroling. Children are able to understand at a young age that the holidays are not all about receiving and opening gifts. They can be helped to understand that time spent with loved ones is valuable and priceless. That is a tradition that will pay off in later years as well.

Sometimes, when we get too stressed out, our sympathetic nervous system kicks into gear. This is what creates our internal emergency response system and the fight or flight instinct. It's why your mouth dries out when you are overly nervous, and you might experience a reduction on appetite. Conversely, when we activate our parasympathetic nervous system by turning on our digestive system, we experience a relaxation response.

The holidays are a perfect opportunity to experiment with healthy stress eating (another oxymoron, right?). Again, it is possible. Anything that makes your mouth water will help you to calm down. This might be having something to drink, sucking on a hard candy, chewing gum, or having a light snack.

Taking a walk around the block after a big meal never hurts either.

## Resources

Jarrell, Jane (2005). *Simple Hospitality*. Nashville: W Publishing Group (Chapter 4, Beyond Harried Holidays)

Pound, Michael A. (2010). *The Myth About Stress*. Morgan Hill Press

Ramsland, Marcia (2007). *Simplify Your Space: Create Order & Reduce Stress*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers

Ramsland, Marcia (2003). *Simplify Your Life: Get Organized and Stay That Way*. Nashville: W Publishing Group (Chapter 12 – Simplify the Holidays)

Slaby, Andrew M.D., PhD., M.P.H (1991). *60 Ways to Make Stress Work For You*. New York: Bantam Books

Sutton, Sarah (2006). *Relax and Make Your Stress Work For You*. England: BBC Active

**Social media blurb #1**

Did you know there was such a thing as good stress? Good stress creates motivation, adrenaline, and the get-up-and-go we need to accomplish big or unpleasant tasks. Good stress usually dies down soon after (or before) the task or project is complete. Are you experiencing stress or anxiety that persists for days on end? Consider talking to someone about it. For more information, or to talk to a counselor, go to [www.catholiccharitiesdubuque.org/catholic-charities-services/counseling-services](http://www.catholiccharitiesdubuque.org/catholic-charities-services/counseling-services), or call 800-772-2758.