

December 2004 Health Bulletin

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(Health Education through Extension Leadership) Staff

Cooperative Extension Service

Celebrating Stress-Free Holidays!

Happy Holidays! What is your favorite part of this magical season? Decorating the tree? Baking goodies for friends and loved ones? Fixing a BIG holiday dinner? Visiting with family and friends? Attending your favorite holiday program? Shopping? Wrapping presents? Decorating the outside of your home? Surprising the kids? Singing carols around the fire?

There are so many opportunities for enjoyment! However, it is also possible to get so wound up that we lose perspective and begin to feel exhausted, frustrated, and grumpy to the point that we are downright miserable. The holidays are not something we should simply try to “survive”, but rather a chance to glow with renewed energy.

Sometimes, it seems as if the holiday season has become a big marketing scheme. Emotional expectations usually run high, so it is not unusual to have some bad days around this time of the year. The question becomes what can YOU do to have a great holiday this year? The answer:

LAUGH!!

That's right – Laugh! We all know there are plenty of opportunities for craziness. Laughing helps us to immediately reduce stress for ourselves and for those around us. When we want everything to be perfect, we tend to become very nit-picky about the smallest of details. In reality, the silly little things that happen during the holidays or other special times are the things we remember with pleasure. Perfect fades into history rather unnoticed. A situation filled with laughter becomes a story that is shared year after year, generation after generation. So when your “perfect” holiday image begins to crumble and something really silly happens, take heart in the fact that you are making memories.

Quick Tips for Reducing Holiday Stress



- 👍 Develop realistic expectations for you and your family during the holiday season.
- 👍 Schedule time to maintain family meal and physical activity schedules.
- 👍 Get plenty of sleep and eat healthy meals and snacks.
- 👍 Schedule private time for yourself. Take a walk, enjoy a bubble bath, read a favorite book, etc.
- 👍 Make a conscious effort to listen and express yourself calmly when you begin to feel stressed.
- 👍 Make a “holiday budget” and stick to it!

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Take time to laugh!

Have you ever found yourself in situations like these?



Your great aunt arrives three hours early, just in case you need some help! Instead of offering help, she spends three hours telling you all of the things that you should have done – that you didn't – to get the Holiday dinner on the table on time!



Just when you get ready to start making your secret family recipe spice cookies you discover that you hid the recipe in a very special (and logical) place so that it wouldn't get lost, only to find that you can't remember where that very special (logical) place may be!



Searching through the attic and basement for all the decorations, lugging them into the living room, getting stuck with evergreen needles as you try to distribute the lights evenly on your tree, then plugging in the lights to find that the last third of three strings do not work. Then, spending the remainder of the evening trying to find the culprit bulb so you can replace it!



Only after you burn the first batch of your secret family recipe spice cookies do you learn that your oven is running a little hot. It was working fine at Thanksgiving, the last time you used it!



As you are getting ready to prepare the holiday turkey, you find that it is still frozen rock solid even though you followed the directions and put it in the refrigerator to thaw four days ago because that was the safe way to defrost poultry! Now it could be dropped from an airplane and used as an aerial weapon to destroy a luxury mansion!



Finally, you get to the last present that needs to be wrapped only to discover that the last shred of wrapping paper in your house is three inches too short to cover the gift!

Sources:

- Doug Burnham, M.S.W., Health Specialist
UK Cooperative Extension HEEL Program
- Gary Hansen, Ph.D., Extension Sociologist
UK College of Agriculture

For more information on health issues in Kentucky, contact your local county Extension office or visit the HEEL Web site at:

www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL