

Beating Holiday Stress



The holidays really are the best of times and the worst of times. Our tidings of comfort and joy can so easily be devoured by the insatiable stress to do it all, be it all, and buy it all.

And that stress is nothing to ho, ho, ho about, either. It increases your risk of illness and even death. One study, published in the Oct. 12, 1999, issue of the journal *Circulation*, suggested holiday stress and overindulgence help explain the soaring rate of fatal heart attacks in December and January.

Yet it is possible to survive the holiday frenzy without feeling frantic -- if you know how. Here are some tips to help with holiday stress:

- **Tip 1. Shop so you don't drop.** Take a personal day off work in the middle of the week. Hit the mall as soon as the doors open, the crowds haven't yet descended, the salespeople are still helpful, and there's plenty of stuff on the shelves. When you've bought too much to carry, go back to the car, drop it off, and go back in again. It's amazing how much you can accomplish. If you find something you really like -- say a hurricane lamp at Crate and Barrel -- buy an assortment in different colors and give one to each of several people on your list. For instance, your sister-in-law, your friend, your co-worker, they never talk to each other and will never know they all received the same gift. And of course, catalogs and Internet retailers make it possible to shop without leaving the comforts of home.
- **Tip 2. Treat yourself.** All that hustling and bustling can drain you. For every 10 presents you buy for others, select a little indulgence for yourself. Try a little Godiva truffle or a Dave Barry calendar -- nothing expensive, just a little pick-me-up. Other essential "treats" for yourself include regular exercise, making time for a movie date with your partner, a soak in a hot tub, or a solitary evening of soothing music.
- **Tip 3. Skip the Nutcracker.** Or if that is simply too much heresy, go ahead and take in the ballet but forgo the big menorah lighting, or the Santa parade, or the holiday ice show. The point is, don't drag yourself or your family from event to event. Think quality, not quantity. Allow each child to pick two events as must-dos. The Nutcracker will be around next year, guaranteed.
- **Tip 4. Stretch the season.** If December is a hotbed of socializing, the weeks that follow tend to be a wasteland. Schedule your holiday bashes for mid-January. By then, guests actually welcome the idea of a party, and you'll have the luxury of time to put it together.

Remember Cascade Centers, Inc. your Employee Assistance Program as a resource to help you learn more satisfying ways to enjoy the holiday season.

