

Twelve steps to reducing your stress

December is a month when people run about frantically buying gifts, gearing up for houseguests and a rush of activities. Before you collapse from the pressure and exhaustion of too many extra demands, sit down, put your feet up and relax. Get in harmony with the season. Here are some suggestions to help you cope and enjoy this special time of year.

1. Organize your time each day so you can get more done with less stress. Make a list of things to do and delegate whenever possible.
2. Eat breakfast, especially if you have a long, demanding morning ahead. For high-energy, long-lasting nutrition, try a blender shake: banana, low-fat milk and your favorite fruit.
3. Don't do something because you're expected to. If you please yourself first, you'll be better off in the long run and so will those who rely on you.
4. Be a perfectionist only when it's required, not when it's a low-priority issue. (It's not necessary to iron your underwear, for example, or to spend an hour wrapping each gift.)
5. Exercise regularly. This may be hard to fit into your already busy schedule but the payoff is worth it: reduced tension, increased energy and endurance to do more.
6. Before you go shopping for gifts, know what you want; decision-making in a crowded,

noisy store can be tiring and frustrating.

7. If waiting in line upsets you because you're tired and rushed, use the time to practice tension-relieving exercises: Starting with your toes and proceeding up your body, slowly tighten and relax every joint and muscle. Or simply use the time to relax—switch gears and allow your thoughts to move on to something more pleasant.

8. Keep meals simple and light even when entertaining. Soup and sandwiches served with fresh fruit is nourishing and always satisfying.

9. Take a walk—daily. It's the best stress reducer of all! Breathe deep and feel every part of your body unwind.

10. Take a hot bath or shower. Tensions can wash down the drain.

11. Get plenty of sleep. When you have a tough problem, think about the pros and cons of it and try to reach a decision before going to sleep.

12. Look forward to tomorrow and all that it has to offer. Above all, take time to laugh and have fun.

Extend your life—Get your blood pumping

You can get hurt playing football, as everybody knows. But according to a case reported in the New England Journal of Medicine, watching football can be dangerous, too.

A year ago, an otherwise healthy, 40-year-old man was brought to the Massachusetts General Hospital with a pulmonary embolus, or blood clot, in the arteries leading to the lungs. He had gotten up on New Year's Day and retired immediately to his sofa to watch three consecutive bowl games. He arose from the sofa only briefly, and went right back to bed when the games were over. This marathon of inactivity nearly killed him.

The elderly are sometimes lonely during the holidays



Christmas is promoted as the most wonderful time of the year, filled with family gatherings, feasting and celebration, and loving and giving. But for some people, the holiday season can be a very lonely time. The "holiday blues" can hit anyone, especially those who become depressed with their own lives when they do not match the idea of the holidays.

People who live alone are particularly vulnerable.

The happiness of the holiday season may have evaporated for those older people who have outlived relatives and friends, are estranged from their families or are simply unable to be with family. In such situations the emphasis on "family togetherness" may only serve to deepen feelings of loneliness.

Some older people who are able to spend the holiday with relatives experience a "let-down" afterwards when they are alone again and life's routine returns.

Holiday loneliness can strike even persons surrounded by family and friends. People don't have to be alone to feel lonely.

Being housebound, or suffering from loss of vision, hearing or ambulation can increase feelings of loneliness. When people don't feel connected to others or if they lack needed emotional relationships they tend to experience loneliness.

The lack of an intimate or close relationship is often felt more acutely during the holidays. A woman caring for a husband afflicted with Alzheimer's disease stated, "At Christmas, the changes in Ted always seem magnified, partly because of how things used to be. Although he is here with me, he's not the person he used to be and our relationship is no longer husband and wife. It's more like mother and son, or nursemaid and patient."

The holidays can be especially difficult for the bereaved, particularly the first Christmas following a divorce or death of a spouse. All around are messages saying we "should" be happy, "should" be having a good time. The contrast between these "shoulds" and the actual feelings of the bereaved can intensify the pain of loss and loneliness.

We also tend to approach the holidays with great expectations. Disappointment may result when holiday joy is less than what we hoped it would be—the call that was not received from a daughter; the family conflict that erupted; the spouse who drank too much; or the children and grandchildren who did not visit.

Planning ahead is one way to combat loneliness and depression. For older adults who will be alone during the holidays, a "family" may be created by getting together with others who are in similar situations.

One 84-year-old man without family ties said, "Too many

people talk only about Christmases when they could be making the current season memorable and enjoyable." Each day during the holiday season he does something which is personally rewarding. At Christmas, he is "Grandpa" to several neighborhood children. Many who are alone often find fulfillment in helping others.

Changing the scene and creating a holiday celebration in a new setting—the beach or the mountains—can be an effective antidote to the holiday blues.

One 70-year-old woman's remedy for loneliness is to keep the pets of her neighbors and friends who leave home for the holidays. She finds that the animals provide companionship. Another woman experiences pleasure in waiting until Christmas Eve to open and read the Christmas cards and letters she received from friends.

We can help the bereaved by encouraging them to identify their needs and then make a plan to fulfill these needs. People who feel they're not an "all right" person unless they do certain things at Christmas can often benefit from permission to banish these "shoulds" and plan something that will provide comfort.

This may mean following family traditions or doing something novel. One person may want to be with family, another may need some time alone to reflect and remember, release anger or cry.

One widow stated, "I didn't feel like celebrating that first Christmas after my husband's death. I wanted to be alone. This was hard on my kids. Christmas had always been a time for family gatherings, but they finally respected my wish. Those days alone were tough. I cried and cried, but it was also the start of an emotional healing for me."

People vulnerable to loneliness need a little more support at this time of the year. A caring touch by telephone, mail or in person can be the best gift given to someone who finds the holidays emotionally difficult.

Avoid the urge to splurge for Christmas gifts

Ask yourself:

- Who do I want to remember with gifts?
- What price range is appropriate and affordable?
- How much, if any, savings can I use for holiday gifts?
- How much of my current income can I afford to spend on gifts?
- How much, if any, can I afford to buy on credit?

Would you consider taking a loan at up to 24 percent interest to buy things you will never use or see again? That is exactly what you do when you use a

credit card for Christmas gifts if you cannot pay for them within 30 days. Credit is an expensive way to buy things.

Unplanned or overenthusias-

tic Christmas spending can push a family into serious financial troubles, especially in January when the bills start to roll in. Here are a few ideas on how you can control your Christmas spending this year instead of having it control you.

• It's not necessary to play Scrooge at Christmas. But do set a limit for your Christmas spending that you think is realistic and fits your budget. Then stick to it. Discuss it as a family and try to get everyone's commitment. It may mean cutting a few corners this year but if the family supports one another, you'll find Christmas every bit as enjoyable and January much more bearable.

• Try setting limits on individual gifts. Parents may decide to spend X dollars per child and, whether the child gets one big gift or several small ones, the dollar limit is the same for each child.

• One way to stick to your budget is to shop well before Christmas to take advantage of sales as they come up. It also helps avoid last minute pressures that result in impulse buying.

• Bargain hunting can be fun. Interesting places to shop in-

clude bargain markets, and auction sales, as well as art and craft shows. Making gifts can be fun and mean a lot to the people who receive them. A gift of service—promising to do something for someone—is an alternative to buying a gift.

Plan ahead now for next year:

- Keep track of your expenses this Christmas. Divide by 12 and put this much money away each month in a savings plan for next December. The money will earn a bit of interest, too.
- Can't afford to put that much money away each month? Then you probably can't afford to spend the larger amount at Christmas.

Keep track of your bills

- Keep a running total at all times, i.e., attach a file card to your credit card and list all purchases when made (as in a check book).
- Once a week, tally up all credit card, check and cash expenditures for Christmas.
- This weekly reminder of how much money you have already spent should help to dampen your "splurge urge."

Add a new twist to your New Year's resolution

What will you do this year to protect your health? As a new year begins, make some resolutions...What can you do to improve and protect your health?

Check the list. Choose that aspect of your lifestyle—stress, diet, exercise—where you feel you have the best chance for success and tackle that one first. Then move on to other areas. One achievement often generates others.

Don't demand too much of yourself, though. Changes made gradually are easier and tend to last.

We feel the last item on this list is a very positive approach to good health. Become informed about health care issues through responsible publications such as this one, and learn to effectively communicate with your physician when the need occurs.

PREVENTIVE HEALTH FACTORS

1. Not smoke*	9.78
2. Avoid dependency on drugs	9.41
3. Never smoke in bed	9.24
4. Wear seat belts all the time*	9.16
5. Never drive after drinking*	9.03
6. Not be exposed to toxic substance or radiation at job	8.94
7. Feel happy with life	8.53
8. Have smoke detectors in home	8.53
9. Not be exposed to accidents or injury on the job	8.43
10. Live where drinking water is acceptable	8.41
11. (Women) Examine breasts each month	8.36
12. Have friends, relatives, neighbors	8.31
13. Live in housing meeting health and safety standards	8.27
14. Have income above poverty level	8.25
15. Exercise regularly*	8.20
16. Drink alcohol moderately*	8.15
17. Take steps to avoid home accidents	8.07
18. Feel happy with job	8.06
19. (Women) Have Pap smear test every one to two years	7.92
20. Not eat too much fat*	7.82
21. Keep close to recommended weight	7.71
22. Receive advice from doctor on health habits	7.67
23. Drive at or below speed limit	7.65
24. Have blood pressure reading annually	7.62
25. Inherit genes from parents for long life	7.62
26. Take steps to control stress*	7.58
27. Have a fire extinguisher	7.54
28. Eat enough fiber*	7.41
29. Get enough calcium	7.28
30. Not get too much cholesterol	7.15
31. Live where air is acceptable	7.12
32. Get enough vitamins, minerals	7.12
33. Have a dental check each year*	7.08
34. Not eat too much sodium	7.04
35. Not eat too much sugar	6.90
36. Get seven to eight hours sleep daily	6.71
37. Get untroubled sleep	6.66
38. Eat breakfast daily*	6.16
39. Drink no alcohol	3.15
40. Educate yourself and family	

* Our medical advisor suggest that you give special attention to these factors.

When giving gifts: It's the thought that counts!

A major problem that recurs year after year is the gift-buying dilemma. This can also be handled with the decision-making process—by starting well in advance of the holiday season.

For close relatives and friends, it may help to look for clues and make notes during the year.

Many people—young people included—are burned out over a commercialized holiday season that emphasizes expensive gifts and lavish parties. The home is the perfect place to start a return to more traditional values of the season by paying attention to sharing and caring, instead of receiving. Creating hand-crafted gifts can signify the giving of oneself and one's time rather than the monetary value of a gift, even when we don't have the time to sew or to make elaborate things. The following list of gift ideas to make at home is designed to start you off.

1. Gift the gift of time. Create coupons for free services make very special gifts and are a good option. Include an expiration date to help ensure that they are used. Sitting with a child, giving a caregiver a break in caring for an ill family member, chauffeuring, and errand-running are things most people can do. How about giving an infirm or elderly person who can't get around too easily several trips to the market for groceries?

2. Often grandparents or a relative away from home will enjoy photographs of familiar scenes and persons, or, younger family members may appreciate

photographs of earlier generations, accompanied by some interesting or unusual written family history.

3. Clip or share shoots from your favorite plants. These can be a nice gift. A lasting, growing plant from a friend can be very special.

4. Give a loaf of bread, a holiday dessert, or an entire dinner. Make up a fruit basket or "goodie" tray. Or, put some favorite recipes in a recipe box and tie with ribbon or yarn.

5. Create a personalized calendar including special dates and photographs.

Have some family fun

- Practice favorite holiday tunes and go caroling—invite some neighbors to go along.
- Make decorating for the holidays a creative event for the whole family.
- Let each member of the family be responsible for suggesting and taking the lead in planning a special holiday event or outing.
- Spend a Saturday afternoon working out together—afterwards, find a restaurant that serves healthy food for dinner.
- Go skiing or roller skating.
- On a cold evening, make popcorn and apple cider and play word games or a board game by the fireplace.
- See a play or enjoy a holiday concert together.

Mammogram a great gift

When word came of Nancy Reagan's mastectomy, we learned that the cancer had not spread to her lymph nodes. A small lesion like hers, confined to a quarter-inch spot, means an excellent prognosis. Mrs. Reagan undoubtedly has been having yearly mammograms as recommended by the guidelines of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the American Cancer Society (ACS).

Sadly, she is in the minority. Data suggest that only about 15 to 20 percent of American women age 50 and over have ever had a mammogram and

that an even much smaller proportion is being examined with systematic regularity.

If your own mother is in the unprotected majority, the nicest Christmas gift from you this year might be your taking her by the hand and accompanying her to the nearest clinic for a reassuring, safe mammogram.

Early detection of breast cancer with mammography can result in reduced mortality. Deaths in women 35 and over can be reduced by about 50 percent through regular mammographic screening of all eligible women.

The best way to cheer yourself up is to cheer somebody else up.

Tips for exercise equipment

1. Always try out equipment to make sure it is comfortable and easy to use. Department stores and sporting goods stores generally have floor models that you can test. If you buy from a catalog or directly from the manufacturer, try your selection first at a store, a friend's house, a local health club or the Community Center. This is especially important for tall or short people who may not fit into some machines.
2. Check construction. If a machine is made of lightweight sheet metal or has numerous plastic parts, it may not stand up to wear. Flimsy rowing machines, for instance, have been known to collapse under the weight of 175-pound users. Look at display models to see how

to use the contents; label and list ingredients.

8. Cover picture frames with padding and fabric. Include an appropriate photo, too.

9. Stuffed animals are welcome gifts for nursing home residents.

10. For the young person on your list, perhaps a 4-H Summer or OSU Summer Week gift certificate would be appropriate. For dates, times and costs, contact the Extension Office.

Shopping Smart-

If you are thinking of buying exercise equipment for yourself or as a holiday gift, here are some tips:

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they have stood up to abuse. Usually the simpler the equipment, the fewer the potential breakdowns. Bikes or other machines that fold up are great if your quarters are tight, but they may be flimsy, so examine them carefully.

3. Think twice about buying bargain-basement equipment, since it may turn you off to exercise. A \$99 exercise bike or rower will probably be uncomfortable, unsteady, hard to use and perhaps dangerous.

4. Check classified ads for "used" equipment; much of this has been used slightly, if at all. Floor models are also usually heavily discounted.

5. Avoid fancy trimmings, such as computer indicators, which add greatly to the cost.