



BalanceWorks® Newsletter



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Stress Management Techniques

Last month, we provided you with helpful holiday tips. This month, with the holiday season in full swing, we will offer some techniques to help you manage any stress that may arise. Even with a great deal of preparation, the holidays can be a bit overwhelming. The following tips will help you relax and maintain good cheer throughout the season!

Identify Stressors

When feeling overwhelmed in general it helps to identify the specific causes of stress. If you are unsure as to what is stressing you out, it may be helpful to start a stress journal. This will allow you to recognize stress patterns and common themes. After you are familiar with your triggers, you can begin to avoid or limit your exposure to these stressors.

For example, if large crowds cause you stress, complete your holiday shopping early in the morning when shopping centers are less likely to be crowded. If the thought of cooking a holiday meal for critical family members stresses you out, do not volunteer to host any formal gatherings. Instead, convince another relative to host and offer to bring dessert and help clean up after the party. Once you have identified your stressors, there are many ways to creatively mitigate your contact with them.

Unfortunately, it would be extremely difficult to avoid all stressors even after you identify them. When you are feeling stressed in the moment try the following strategies to calm down:

Take a Deep Breath – Breathing is one of the best and simplest ways to ease stress. Find somewhere comfortable to sit, close your eyes and take slow deep breaths that fill your abdomen rather than your chest. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to continue this breathing exercise for at least 5 minutes.

Practice Shoulder Shrugs – If you feel stress taking a physical toll practice the following exercise. Lift your shoulders up as high as you can, hold for ten seconds and release them back down and back. Repeat this throughout the day whenever you feel tense.

Take a Break – Some stressful circumstances are unavoidable, but you can always temporarily remove yourself from a stressful situation. If your nagging Aunt corners you at a family gathering and insists upon criticizing everything from your outfit to your job, simply excuse yourself and exit the conversation. Although you may not be able to avoid your Aunt altogether, you can certainly take a break from a tense conversation.

For more information or support on stress management, contact the work/life experts at **BalanceWorks®** by calling:

1.800.327.2255

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Practice Positivity – Over the holidays it is not uncommon to start feeling overwhelmed thinking about all you have to get done. The thought of balancing shopping, cooking, cleaning, decorating, sending holiday cards and finishing up projects at work before the New Year is enough to make your head spin. If this starts to happen, take a few minutes to write down everything that you have already accomplished to prepare for the holidays. Then list everything you still have to complete and devise a plan to get everything done in a timely, but non-hectic manner. Finally, remind yourself that you will get everything accomplished and if you don't, it's OK.

Long Term Stress Busters

It's important to have an arsenal of techniques to alleviate stress in the moment but it also helps to fortify our bodies and minds so that we are better able to manage stress long term. Try to incorporate these healthy stress busting habits into your life during the holidays and all year:

Exercise – The good news is that any type of exercise from weight lifting to yoga to walking can act as a stress reliever. Exercise increases the production of endorphins, which are the “feel good” neurotransmitters in your brain. It also serves as meditation in motion. Often when people are working out, they are mindful and focused on the task at hand rather than concentrating on the various stressors in their lives. Finally, exercise increases your physical wellbeing, which contributes to overall wellness!

Nutrition – The holidays are synonymous with rich comfort foods. While cookies, stuffing, and eggnog are delicious, there are other foods that can actually help fight stress. Food

that is high in flavonoids such as dark chocolate and chamomile tea have relaxing properties. Food that is high in Omega-3 fatty acids like salmon can help reverse stress by boosting serotonin levels. Food that is high in folate, such as sunflower seeds, helps your body produce a pleasure-inducing brain chemical called dopamine. Food that is high in magnesium like spinach has been shown to improve your body's response to stress. Finally, food high in antioxidants, such as blueberries, counteracts the effects of stress hormones like cortisol on your body.

Take time for yourself – Regardless of your busy schedule it is always important to set time aside to de-compress and take part in something that you truly enjoy. Try to carve out a window of time that is allotted just for you. Use this time to do something that relaxes you. You can meditate, read, have a cup of tea, listen to music, or just sit quietly on your couch. Anything that provides you with a sense of calm will work.

Remember that your EAP is available if you are feeling especially stressed or overwhelmed this holiday season. In addition, your Personal Assistants are available if you need last minute gift ideas or a recipe for apple pie. We are here to ensure that you have a happy, healthy, and stress free holiday season!

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