



PREVENTING HOLIDAY BLUES

By Dr. Arjuna Veeravagu ND RAc

Although the winter holiday season is a joyous time of year, it can also be stressful and challenging for many people. The combination of increased year-end job responsibilities, frequent social engagements, financial pressures, decreased daylight and cold wet weather can take their toll on your health. Nationwide, physicians report a significant increase in patient visits for anxiety and depression during the holiday season. Thankfully, there are several things you can do to help you enjoy holiday festivities and while minimizing stress levels and mood fluctuations.

CONTINUE EXERCISING

As the holiday season marks the period of the least daylight of the year as well as increased rainy weather, many people struggle to continue their regular exercise routines. Regular aerobic activities such as hiking, running and cycling can be combined with fun winter outings like skiing, skating and snow-shoeing to maintain optimal fitness and balance moods. Schedule your workouts like you do any other aspect of your life and make yourself a priority.

DIETARY BALANCE

The term "holiday party" usually conjures up the image of a huge smorgasbord of decadent food and drink. If many of your social events seem to revolve around food, it is important to enjoy yourself and choose your battles wisely: just say no to the cookies and candies that are forever around the office in December; treat yourself a little when something really special is offered. Be sure to eat lightly, featuring plenty of fruits and vegetables, for most of your meals during December to balance the indulgence.

MAINTAIN ADEQUATE SLEEP

Inadequate or irregular sleep often occurs during the winter holidays due to work and social commitments and can have a strong adverse impact on the body. A normal 24-hour sleep/wake cycle is called our circadian rhythm and is a requirement for many hormonal processes in the body. After a prolonged period of irregular sleep it can be difficult to re-establish a healthy circadian rhythm.

SCHEDULE QUIET TIME

The heavy social demands of the holiday season stop many people from making time for quiet solitude. Scheduling a weekly yoga or meditation class in advance through the holiday season can help one maintain a commitment to relaxation and help prevent anxiety or depression from setting in.

HERBAL AND NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT

The combination of elevated work stress, decreased sleep and overindulgence can take its toll on the body's adrenal function. The adrenal glands regulate our stress response and adrenal imbalances can lead to diverse health issues such as depression, anxiety, recurrent infections, chronic fatigue and/or pain, weight gain and an overall decreased stress tolerance. Taking adaptogenic (adrenal balancing) herbs as well as vitamins B5 and C can make one's body more resilient during periods of elevated stress like the winter holidays. Supplementation with vitamin D, which we obtain almost exclusively from our skin's exposure to sunlight, may help balance moods during the short overcast days typical of our local holiday season. For those experiencing mild to moderate depression, the herb St. John's Wort is a well-researched natural treatment option.

References:

Mayo Clinic. *Stress, depression and the holidays: 12 tips for coping*. 2007.

Shames, Richard MD. *Nutritional Management of Stress-Induced Dysfunction*, Advanced Nutrition Publications, 2002.

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