



Surviving The Holidays

Tips for supermom and superdad

ON NOVEMBER 25 | IN HOUSE & HOME | BY DR. ANDREA YCAZA | WITH NO COMMENTS

by Dr. Andrea Ycaza

In the blink of an eye the holiday season is upon us again. Although it is undoubtedly meant to be a time for joy and celebration, it can also result in high levels of stress. The demands of shopping, wrapping, decorating, preparing holiday meals and attending holiday parties (just to name a few) often have to be squeezed into our already hectic schedules. It is no wonder that many people report an increase of stress around this time. This is particularly true for those who juggle several roles and responsibilities, and at the same time worry about making this time special for their loved ones. Yes, I'm talking to you, The supermom and superdad.

So how do we keep stress from crashing our holiday festivities? Here are some tips to help you enjoy this holiday season without this uninvited guest.....STRESS.

Prioritize your time

During such a busy time of the year, it is likely you will feel pulled in different directions. Others may make demands of your time and it may feel very difficult to just say 'no.' However, the simple truth is that as much as we may want to, we just can't be everywhere at once. We must then make clear choices about how we want to allocate the most precious resource we have, our time! Think about what is most important to you and your family, what memories you want make. It is important to do this as early as you can to avoid over committing to events or

activities that you don't really want to partake in. There is nothing wrong with politely declining. Decide what matters most. Don't forget that to your children that equals love. Be sure to reserve some time to spend with them, when you aren't running from house to house, or mall to mall.

Keep your goals small and manageable

Plan all the holiday meals! Get all the holiday shopping done! Oh, and don't forget to wrap those gifts! Sound familiar? The list usually goes on and on. The truth is, the normal list still keeps running at the same time. Cook dinner, clean the house, take care of the kids, play with kids, get kids to all their activities and oh right, and lets not forget to get up to make it on time for work. This usually leaves the busy Supermom or dad doing work while sitting and waiting for dance class to end, or for soccer practice to finish. Forget all the holiday add-ons, daily life can sometimes feel stressful enough. Keeping our goals small and manageable makes them realistic and most importantly achievable. We feel good after we accomplish a task. So, break down those big tasks. Set yourself up for success! Don't forget that this is also a good time to delegate. Even though your spouse doesn't always help with the food shopping, now is the time to learn. If not your spouse, find other helping hands that are available, even for hire.

Be Mindful

Remind yourself to bring your awareness to the here and now. One strategy is to use your five senses. Use your sense of smell to find soothing smells, those holiday treats or fresh air outside. Look around and take time to notice your loved ones, use your eyes to really notice the glimmer of the candle lights of the menorah, the twinkly Christmas lights, the beautiful wrapping on the presents, the smell of freshly made potato latkes. Take a moment to listen to the sounds of laughter and even those holiday tunes. You get the idea. Revel in the memories you are creating today!

Take care of yourself

We are so often worried about taking care of our loved ones or taking care of our 'to do' list that we neglect to think about ourselves. This is one of the biggest mistakes we can make. Most people say: "There's no time for that!" "Isn't that selfish!" "If I don't take care of everything, who else will do it?" Well, it is because so many people depend and count on you that you want to be running on tiptop shape. The only way to do this is by taking care of yourself. How do you this? Take a warm bath, give yourself 20 minutes to read a few pages of that book you enjoy, go out with a friend for coffee, enjoy a good game with your kids, listen to soothing music, etc. Whatever task you find relaxing or enjoyable will work. You don't need occupy the whole day; 20 minutes here and there will go a long way. Most importantly, take time to breathe. In through your nose and out through your mouth can help offset the buildup of stress in a day. Your car doesn't run without gas, your cell-phone doesn't work without battery and you won't function at your best without some 'me time'.

Kids Schedules

Let's not forget that this time can be very exciting for little ones. The anticipation and excitement can be a joy to watch, but can also lead to a disruption to the usual routine. Children are more likely to feel off schedule, not sleep as long or as well and have a change in their feeding times due to the parties and festivities. This all results in increased crankiness and more stress for parents. This is because children need routine and structure to provide them with a sense of security. It is very important to try to adhere to your normal routine as much as you can during this busy time. When changes are unavoidable, talk to your child so he/she knows what to

expect (i.e. scheduling time for naps when the family will be out later than usual, pack extra healthy snacks). Try to remember that if you are feeling stressed, so are your children, so try to have extra patience when dealing with them. They need you to empathize and understand when they are moody, recognize that it's not their fault that they are off schedule. Children thrive on routine, so expect that they will have meltdowns when their schedule is changed, but yelling at them is not the solution. Getting them back on track is!

For some people, the stress just gets too unmanageable and it may be a time to consider talking to a Licenced Clinical Psychologist. Dealing with the extra stress of the holidays can sometimes be enough to trigger some issues that we may have been struggling with all year round. These issues may affect us during holiday times more than at other times of the year. Check the College of Psychologists of Ontario website in 'Member Search' for a Psychologist near you (www.cpo.on.ca). As Psychologists are covered by most private insurance benefit plans, check your plan to see if you are covered for services. Freshly armed with these strategies, keep in mind that this time is about peace, joy and celebration. You can do it!