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## Stress-Less Holiday Season

The holiday season is a joyful time to celebrate blessings of health, family and friends. But for many, this season is a time of stress, anxiety and even depression. With the pressure to buy gifts and maintain elaborate holiday traditions, millions of people become overwhelmed to an even greater extent than normal. Sadly, for some, the season becomes a string of events to endure, rather than experiences to enjoy.

According to the American Psychological Association, 61% of Americans experience stress during the holiday season due to lack of money; 42% due to the pressure to give gifts; 34% due to the lack of time; 23% due to credit card debt; and 36% due to the negative effects on health (over eating and alcohol consumption).

How does your stress compare to these averages? What are you willing to do differently this year to enjoy a stress-less season? To start, think about the events that trigger stress for you. Then, focus on one or two actions you can take to reduce your stress.

### Ten Ways to Enjoy a Stress Free Holiday Season

1. **Know your spending limit.** Make this year different by setting a budget and sticking to it. Remember, it's okay to tell your children that certain toys cost too much or that they will not get everything on their list. They'll learn

valuable lessons in delayed gratification and gain a sense of responsibility.

2. **Don't buy gifts you'll spend the rest of the year trying to pay off.** Resolve not to use credit cards this year unless you can pay the total balance each month. The \$60 video game will cost much more with interest.
3. **Give something personal.** You can show love with any gift that is meaningful and personal; it doesn't have to cost a lot — a nice ornament or decoration, journal, framed photo or a book make great personal gifts.
4. **Consider making gifts this year.** Homemade gifts are always the favorite kind. Layer decadent cookie ingredients in a jar for teachers and co-workers; frame the kids' photos or artwork for grandparents; string bracelets with inexpensive beads for nieces and friends; or just use words to let people know how important they are by making a phone call or writing a note sharing your feelings.
5. **Just say no.** There is no rule that you have to attend every holiday event you're invited to. Choose a few gatherings with people you really enjoy spending time with and politely decline the others.
6. **Get organized.** Make lists or use an appointment book to keep track of your budget, gifts you want to make or purchase, tasks to do and events to attend. Share tasks and have fun at the same time by inviting your friends and family over to decorate, wrap gifts or make cookies.
7. **Be realistic.** Try not to put pressure on yourself to create the perfect holiday. Focus instead on the few traditions that make the holidays really special to your

For more information about these and other health-related topics, you can access "Living Healthy with WebMD" by logging into MyBlueService. Here you can browse valuable medical information and access personal health tools like health trackers, assessments and more. Visit [www.bcbsfl.com](http://www.bcbsfl.com) to get started.

## Packing Presents Instead of Pounds

As we approach the holidays, we look forward to spending time with family and friends – and let's be honest, enjoying great food! Brace yourself for the endless temptation of sweet chocolates and candies, rich party foods and casseroles, and decadent pies and cakes. With a plan in hand, you can enjoy the holidays without the extra pounds. Here are some tips for holiday baking, shopping, traveling and eating out.

### Modify your baking to control the amounts of saturated fat, salt and sugar — without sacrificing taste.

- Substitute one cup of whole milk with one cup of fat free milk plus a tablespoon of unsaturated oil like canola or olive oil.
- Substitute two egg whites for each egg called for in a recipe or choose a cholesterol free egg substitute.
- Use equal amounts of applesauce or pureed pumpkin instead of oil or butter.
- Lower salt intake by using herbs instead of salt, eating foods with less than 5% sodium and choosing steamed vegetables without butter or salt.
- Lighten up on sugar by using sugar substitutes or dried fruit such as raisins, dates or apricots.
- Add more whole grains by replacing half of the regular flour with whole wheat flour and adding oats, brown rice flour, ground flax seeds or wheat germ.

### Buy holiday foods that are healthy for you.

- Pumpkin adds vitamin A and loads of fiber in baked goods and other foods like pancakes, sauces and soups.
  - Cranberries contain antioxidants that help your body handle stress and defend against atherosclerosis, or fatty build-up in your arteries.
  - Figs provide potassium and fiber, and lower triglycerides (your bad fat).
    - Sweet potatoes contain lots of vitamin C and are a great source for potassium and fiber.



- Potatoes contain vitamin B-6, iron, potassium and fiber. (Remember, the key to keeping potatoes healthy is in the preparation.)
- Low fat eggnog provides calcium and protein.

### Prepare for parties the healthy way.

- Keep hunger at bay by eating a healthy snack or small meal before leaving the house. You can better control your calories if you start the evening full.
- Select smaller portions, filling your plate first with healthy vegetables, fruit and nuts, then going back for little tastes of higher fat selections.
- Eat slowly and enjoy the flavors. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to send the message that you are full.
- Eliminate the urge to graze and pick at the buffet all evening by mingling in a spot far away from the table.
- If you're the host, provide plenty of vegetables and fruit based snacks.
- Avoid overindulging in alcohol. Decide your limit and stick to it.

### Make better choices when you're eating out.

- Order water or a beverage with no added sugar such as unsweetened tea.
- Ask for whole wheat bread for sandwiches and hold the mayo.
- Start your meal with a salad and fat free or low fat dressing. Order the dressing on the side so you can control calories.
- Choose main dishes with steamed, grilled or broiled vegetables, lean meats and skinless poultry.

### Stock up on healthy, easy-to-store snacks when you're traveling.

- Portion snack bags of unsalted nuts and dried fruits.
- Carry low fat cheese sticks.
- Pack no-fuss fresh fruits and vegetables like apples, oranges, and carrot and celery sticks.

### Remember to balance your eating habits. Too much of anything is not good for you.

- Make smart choices from every food group.
- Get the most nutrition out of your calories.
- Stay within your daily calorie need.
- Cook and eat more meals at home.
- Grill, braise, broil or steam foods instead of frying or sautéing.
- Drink plenty of water.

family. Also remember that just because it's a holiday, family problems don't go away. If you have a hard time being around your relatives, it's okay to set limits on your time at events and visits.

8. **Take time to relax.** Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Meditate, do some relaxation breathing, go for a short walk, and try to maintain a regular sleep, meal and exercise schedule. Taking care of yourself will help you deal with stressful situations.
9. **Don't overindulge.** Limit your alcohol and rich food intake to eliminate post-holiday stress about extra pounds or unhealthy choices.
10. **Keep it simple.** The holidays are not about the number of gifts you give or get, or the number of parties you throw or attend. It's about taking time with family and friends to cozy up and simply enjoy being together.

Sometimes the holidays trigger depression, especially if you're dealing with the death of a loved one or a broken relationship. You may feel embarrassed to ask for help, or you may think you'll get over "the blues" on your own, but most people need treatment to get better. Talk with your doctor about counseling and medicine for depression.

Remember, you don't have to be a super hero! Gaining perspective and setting priorities will help establish balance and lead to a healthy, happy holiday season. If you make one change this year, your vision of "HAPPY HOLIDAYS" will take shape one season at a time.

# Fresh & Healthy

Recipe of the Month

## Pumpkin Biscotti

Whether you are preparing this as a gift or just a treat for your family, these cookies won't last long!

- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 3/4 cup canned pumpkin
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder



Preheat oven to 375°. Lightly spray a nonstick baking sheet with oil. Combine eggs, sugar, spice and pumpkin in mixing bowl. Stir in flour and baking powder. Form two 9-inch long, flat loaves on a nonstick baking sheet; use wet hands since the dough is very sticky.

Bake for 30 minutes or until firm in center. Cool on a rack for 15 minutes. Slice like bread in 1/2-inch pieces. Arrange the slices cut-side up on a nonstick baking sheet and bake again at 375° for 25 minutes or until crisp and lightly golden. Cool thoroughly; store covered.

**Nutrition information:** Serving= 2 cookies; Calories: 80; Total fat: 0.5g; Saturated fat: 0; Trans fat: 0; Cholesterol: 25mg; Sodium: 45 mg; Carbohydrates: 17g; Fiber: 1g; Sugar: 5g; Protein: 2g; Vit. A: 25%; Calcium: 2%; Iron: 3%. (Percentages based on a 2,000-calorie diet.)

## Ask the Health Coach

**Q** I'm trying to eat better and reduce my cholesterol, but I'm confused about whether I should use margarine or butter. I've heard that margarines contain trans fats. Should I use butter instead?

**A** There's a lot of confusion these days about trans fats. Trans fats are created when an extra hydrogen atom is added to healthy unsaturated fats (polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids). This process is called hydrogenation. The purpose of hydrogenating oils is to increase a product's shelf life and improve its consistency. (You may remember the first margarines on the market and how they separated in the container.) Also, hydrogenated oils used for frying are not chemically altered, which means the oil can be used repeatedly.

Completely hydrogenated fats carry almost 100% saturated fatty acids (the bad kind) with no essential fatty acids. Unlike other dietary fats, trans fats are not only unnecessary, they're unhealthy, too. Consuming trans fats increases

your risk for heart disease by raising your LDL cholesterol (bad) levels, lowering HDL (good) cholesterol levels, and increasing triglycerides (fat in the bloodstream). Unfortunately, research indicates that Americans eat larger amounts of trans fats than saturated fats. While the body can use some saturated fat for energy, saturated fat tends to stick together and leave deposits in the organs and arteries. This increases the risk of heart disease and stroke by creating blockages in the arteries, forcing the heart to work harder and preventing oxygenated blood from moving freely.

Your best bet is to use soft tub margarine or non-hydrogenated margarines instead of butter, but use it sparingly. Look for margarines that have zero trans fats. Some brands of margarine will have small amounts of partially hydrogenated oils, which is still significantly less than the amount of saturated fat in butter.



## Exercise for the Time Crunched

The year has passed quickly and it is hard to believe it's time to gear up for parties, family get-togethers, shopping and decorating. The holidays spark fun and activity, but the demand for your time can easily interrupt healthy habits. Avoid throwing your routine totally aside by staying active all month. Here's how to stay on track:

- Replace a coffee break with a brisk 10-minute walk. Ask a co-worker to go with you.
- Get the whole family involved and enjoy a pre-dinner touch football game or an after dinner walk.
- Walk the dog. Fido needs the exercise too.
- Clean the house or wash the car.
- Do stretches, exercises or pedal a stationary bike while watching television.
- Play with the kids. Tumble in the leaves or dance to your favorite music.
- Take a lap around the mall before shopping. You'll find the best sales.
- Park in the furthest spot and walk. This leaves closer spots (if there are any) for those who cannot.
- Spend more time dancing at holiday parties and less time talking or eating.
- Swear off the elevator and use the stairs.

Remember, just three 10-minute blocks of physical activity each day can provide the health benefits of a regimented exercise routine. If you're ready to get physically active and would like some guidance and support, contact a Health Coach for free, one-on-one assistance in creating your perfect plan. Call or email our Next Steps team at 1-800-477-3736, ext. 54837 or email [NextSteps@bcbsfl.com](mailto:NextSteps@bcbsfl.com).

## National Handwashing Awareness Week

December 7-13

Did you know that germs can linger on hard surfaces for two to eight hours? You can see why it's important to wash your hands frequently, thoroughly and properly. To prevent spreading germs, wash your hands (both sides) with soap and water for 20 seconds (or two verses of "Happy Birthday"); avoid touching your nose, eyes and mouth; and cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm.

## Are you interested in making healthy changes to your diet but need some guidance?



The Next Steps team has Health Coaches who will work with you one-on-one developing goals and helping you to learn more about good nutrition — free of charge. Email us at [NextSteps@bcbsfl.com](mailto:NextSteps@bcbsfl.com) or call 1-800-477-3736, ext. 54837.

### Resources

[webmd.com](http://webmd.com)

[eatright.org](http://eatright.org)

[mypyramid.gov](http://mypyramid.gov)



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