

Holidays are an eagerly anticipated break from the normal routine. They can also be a time of great stress – not to mention brutal on the waistline. Willis has prepared a few helpful strategies to see you through a time of year that can be filled with as much cause for celebration as it is a cause for stress.

Surviving Holiday Stress

Does there come a point in every holiday season when you're standing in one more endless mall line, hearing one more Christmas ditty, seeing yet another replay of *It's A Wonderful Life*, and you suddenly feel like throttling someone's turtle dove? When festive becomes frenetic and decking the halls turns into thoughts of decking your brother-in-law, you know you are in the grip of holiday stress.

Rest assured you are not alone. Holiday stress may be inevitable, but it doesn't have



to get the best of you. By employing some of the following strategies, you can reduce your stress, deal more effectively with shopping, family visits and those

sleepless nights that can result from putting together toys for the tots or from too much celebrating – and maybe really enjoy this time of year.

Recognize the Signs

When we think of stress symptoms, high blood pressure, elevated heart rate, overeating and excessive sweating come to mind. Other more subtle signs, such as irritability, insomnia, anxiety, headaches,

indigestion and muscle tension, may also be telling you that you need to pause and take care of yourself.

Hit the Cardiovascular Exercise

Yes, you've seen this recommendation a million times for beating holiday weight gain, but the gym is also a stress beater and a great escape. You can work out (exercise, all by itself, relieves stress because of the healthy way it releases endorphins into your brain...an all-natural high), relax in the hot tub or sweat out your stress in the steam room. For those who can't afford the gym, cardiovascular benefits can be just as easily achieved by walking briskly, jogging or running. In addition to burning all those calories and minimizing holiday weight gain, exercise can get you out of the house when you need a break from the family!



Remember that if you are new to an exercise program or have not exercised in quite a while, you should consult your physician before beginning to workout.

Get Help!

You don't have to do it all yourself. Nowhere is it written that you must single-handedly take care of the shopping, wrapping, cleaning and cooking, and trying

to do it all is a sure recipe for disaster. Though they often don't think of it on their own, family members are generally glad to pitch in and help out when asked to do so.

Food

Holidays turn most of us into binge eaters. Running all over town shopping, skipping lunch and then overdosing on the cookies and fudge that a colleague has brought to work leaves us bouncing around like hypoglycemic ping pong balls.

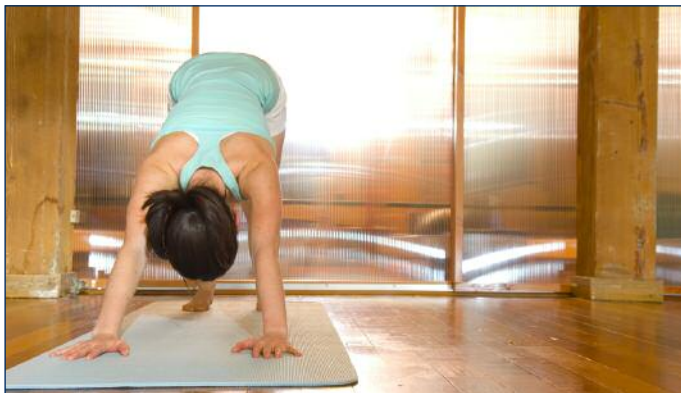
To help ward off temptation, enlist the support of a designated nagger – someone who will gently remind you when you are overdoing it. Someone who will tug you away from the buffet table. Someone who will remind you to take reasonable portions and move away. In the absence of such an assistant, we offer this adage: out of sight, out of mind.

Just Say NO!

You can give yourself no better gift this holiday season than permission to say "no." Assign priorities. Attend the functions you must attend, and do the tasks you can't entrust to a spouse or kids. Say no to everything that is of little or no importance to you. If you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of anyone or anything else when you really want or need to.

Employ Your Relaxation Technique of Choice

Everyone knows that yoga is fantastic for flexibility, but it's also great for preparing your mind, body and soul for the annual visit with the in-laws. So when your mother-in-law wheezes, "I spent hours preparing this pie, but I'm sure yours is better," instead of grinding your teeth and feeling your blood pressure shoot above the danger zone, just smile serenely and assume your *Downward Facing Dog Pose*. Seriously, yoga and many other medita-



tion/relaxation techniques have been proven to dramatically increase overall well-being and reduce stress.

Reward Yourself

When the holidays are over, reward yourself for a job well done. Treating yourself to a massage or a facial (or both!) are excellent toppers to the holiday season and segues to the new year.



Holiday Perspective

The holiday season is a minefield of stresses, small and large. For most of us, time, money and energy are limited, but expectations can be sky high. Try to keep in mind that in two years – and maybe even two weeks – no one will remember that the tree lights didn't blink or the turkey was dry. The holidays should be a time for fun and relaxation with family and friends, but it's best to remember that we can define our own fun and create our own relaxation. Maintaining this perspective will go a long way toward keeping your stresses in check this holiday season.

Natural Born Enemies: The Holiday Season vs. Your Waistline

What's your holiday dining dream? Turkey with all the trimmings? Pumpkin pie with a side of eggnog? Just the thought of our favorite holiday fare makes our mouths water and our stomachs grumble. For many, it also inspires an annual New Year's resolution: lose the weight we've put on over the holidays. How can we enjoy the holidays without falling off our weight management wagon? The following suggestions may help you greet seasonal temptation with confidence instead of holiday-induced helplessness.



Plan Ahead

Successful weight management often boils down to good planning, and more than at any other time, planning is critical during holidays. You should rehearse what you'll say when you're offered foods you shouldn't eat. You should know in advance what foods you'll eat instead. And you should keep in mind the ways to enjoy the season that aren't food-related. If you have a well thought out course of action, you will not be caught off guard. Make your plan as tangible as possible by writing it down. The more concrete it is to you, the more likely you are to stick to it.



Don't Run on Empty

Whatever you do, don't go to a party hungry and don't save your appetite for a big end-of-the day meal. Eat a mini-meal before the office get-together. Make yourself healthy snacks throughout the day during a holiday weekend. If you face a buffet table on an empty stomach, you have little chance of avoiding diet disaster. Just as skipping meals on a day-to-day basis does not promote successful weight management, starving yourself during the day so you'll truly appreciate Mom's famous turkey

will probably be a mistake. You'll appreciate everything all too much; i.e., in too much quantity.

Be Picky

We eat some food because we love it and some because it's there. Save your fat/calories/carbs – whatever you're watching – for your favorite foods only. Don't feel guilty when you do partake, but at the same time, don't give yourself a license to overindulge. Enjoy your favorite dessert or side dish, but not with wild abandon – portion control is crucial. If you're going to eat something you know is not exactly healthy, don't berate yourself while you are consuming it, or afterwards. Feeling guilty has not been proven to burn more calories.

Move!

Increase your activity level to offset extra calories. A daily walk is a healthy habit to continue after the holidays. Don't let a beautiful day pass you by without taking a walk outside. Don't



just watch everyone dance, join in. Park far away (you'll probably have no choice!), take the stairs instead of the elevator and explore a new mall from one end to the other instead of following the directory (just be sure to take along your sneakers). Incorporate extra walking whenever you can during your holiday outings and beyond.

If You Booze, You Won't Lose

The term *beer belly* may not be delicate, but it is accurate – alcohol can be fattening. Whether you're downing a shot, a glass of wine or a pitcher of beer, those empty calories add up (an eight-ounce glass of eggnog with rum contains 450 calories). Drinking will not suppress your appetite; in fact, it may loosen up your determination and cause you to binge on foods you might never have touched sober. If you do choose to drink, try making some switch-offs, like downing a light beer or wine spritzer instead of a stout or a full glass of wine.



Don't Be a Grinch!

These are just a few suggestions some have found helpful in battling the holiday war on weight gain. In the end, it all comes down to being focused – on yourself, your goals and enjoying this special time with your loved ones. Stay motivated in your weight management efforts, but don't be so locked in that you let the holidays slip past you without enjoying them. The point is to use common sense and have fun. Reserve a little will power for self-restraint, but don't be constantly policing yourself.

And what if you do indulge? Don't be a Grinch! Berating yourself will only increase your stress and the likelihood of failure; forgiving yourself will help assure continued weight management success.

New Year's Diet Resolutions: Recognizing Fad Diets

Every year about this time, many people repeat an annual ritual: they make a New Year's resolution to lose weight, to lose it fast and lose it now. What they usually don't take into consideration is that the extra weight did not appear overnight and sadly, won't disappear overnight either – or even over the course of a few weeks. Ever optimistic (or desperate), Americans spend approximately \$40 billion dollars annually on the quest for a miracle weight-loss program; one that will be fast and permanent. Unfortunately, most of this money is spent on fad diets that in the long run don't help and in many cases, actually have harmful long-term effects.



Literally hundreds of fad diets compete for the attention of the weight conscious. They come in many varieties: low-fat, low-carbohydrate, high-protein and liquid diets. Some focus on one particular type of food (who can forget the grapefruit diet?). These diets typically lack essentials, such as fiber, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals and can lead to health problems later in life.

Common fad-diet strategies include blaming hormones for weight gain or banning particular foods. What diet promoters usually fail to mention is that upon completion of the diet, the weight lost (if there is in fact any weight lost) is almost always regained in a relatively short period of time, because dieters tend to resume old eating habits once the program is over.

Check any new weight loss plan against the following points to determine if the program might be categorized as a fad diet.

- Promises a quick fix
- Includes dire warnings
- Claims sound too good to be true
- Simplistic conclusions drawn from a complex study
- Recommendations based on a single study
- Dramatic statements that are refuted by reputable scientific organizations
- Lists of "good" and "bad" foods
- All advice points to one answer: *their* product
- Opinions based on studies published without peer review
- Recommendations from studies that ignore differences among individuals or groups
- The menu has no variety
- Food choices consist of mostly meats
- Fat cannot be eaten or is severely restricted
- Meals are drunk rather than eaten

The benefits of living at your healthy weight are immeasurable. You will look and feel better, reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, decrease stress and increase energy levels. Oh yes, and you could well live longer, too. Entering a weight management program is a great idea. Just make sure you research weight management plans before you start one and speak with your doctor or a nutritionist if you have any questions or concerns, especially if you are beginning an exercise regimen as part of your overall weight management program. And don't look for miracles.

Whichever dietary course you choose, keep in mind that a sound weight management program requires regular physical activity and develops healthy eating patterns for life, not just the life of the program.

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