



Pick Your Path to Health

Managing Family Stress During the Holidays

This holiday season make a special list. And check it twice! No! Not the kind of list that asks for presents, but one that helps you and your family navigate the stress the holiday season brings. Regardless of how few activities you have planned, stress can creep into your family life because many factors intensify during the holidays.

African American women, like most women who have multiple demands in their lives, often don't find the time to think about how stressed they are.

As a mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, employee, employer and volunteer, you have myriad responsibilities. Your list may be quite long and overwhelming, but slowing down, thinking about how you will handle all the tasks, making a plan, and asking for assistance will help you survive the holidays.

Reverend Alice Davis, Executive Minister of Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., says that one of the major sources of stress for African American women is gift giving. "We tend to give expensive gifts that sometimes we can't afford. Gift giving doesn't have to be expensive. We tend to overspend, and we should not do it because overspending will give us stress the rest of the year."

Stress is unavoidable, but it can be controlled and minimized. Set the tone early, and your family will follow your lead:

- Set a budget for gift giving to avoid overspending.
- Make presents at home such as bookmarks, cookies, tree ornaments, or holiday cards.
- Find free activities to share with your family.
- Avoid the pressure to buy a gift for every child and adult in your family.
- Institute a family gift exchange to ease money tensions.

Stress does not come only from holiday-related activities. An ill family member, loneliness during the holidays, unresolved grudges with family members, weight-related issues, drinking problems, and work may all contribute to stress.

It is key, however, to identify the issues that cause you stress. If seeing that cousin who has not spoken to you in years is stressful, then try to put the situation in perspective:

- You can't mend a relationship in one day, but the holiday season may lend itself to a renewed spirit of forgiveness.
- Limit the length of your visit or conversation with a person who upsets you.
- Try to enjoy the company of family members you miss.
- Children's happiness is contagious; enjoy their company.
- Focus on the blessings your family has received during the year.

Stress not only reduces your quality of life but it can develop into depression, which is common, especially among women, during the holidays. Consider some of these recommendations to help you get started with your plan to reduce and manage stress:

- Share the list of tasks you need to accomplish. Enlist the help of your significant other, your children, other family members, and friends.
- Attend celebrations that bring you peace and joy.
- Share the holidays with a neighbor, volunteer at a shelter, or adopt a family in need.
- Do something just for yourself.
- Have family get-togethers and focus on the positive.
- Have a potluck holiday celebration so no one feels overwhelmed with all the preparations.
- Shop early to avoid the crowds.
- If you don't celebrate the holidays, prepare mentally for the activities that surround you. Find something to do that you really like, holiday-related or not, and have fun.
- Don't worry about a perfectly clean house; enjoy the clutter of the holidays!

Use these tips to reduce stress and to lead you down a path to better health on your way to a brand new year!

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For other tips on improving your health, or for more information on the Pick Your Path to Health campaign, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov>.