

Marks Remarks by Mark Rowen Lincoln County Educator 11-19-09

The Holiday is here and everything is wonderful....give me a break...are you kidding. There is the shopping to do usually putting everything on the plastic; don't forget Aunt Martha will be there for that great pumpkin pie you make; cousin John will be back this year, first time in 10 years and everyone will expect an invitation so they can see him. The kids have the school recital, the church has the musical, don't forget you volunteered to help with the tournament food stand and....and ...etc.

All of this makes for a stressful holiday season. There are documented studies showing the direct relationship between stress and physical illness. Our bodies just do not handle stress very well, in fact usually around the holiday is when I get sick. Studies show stress reduces our immune system functioning.

Well with this said, here are some tips to TRY to reduce the stress around the holidays:

1. One of the major sources of stress is FINANCIAL. Trying to find that perfect gift and no matter the cost. This type of stress can be helped by planning a budget. One way is take money, put it in an envelope with a name on it. When the money is gone, the shopping for little John is done as well. NO EXCEPTIONS.

2. ONE THING AT A TIME, only. This reduces the need for back tracking. Make a list for that shopping day, but also try to plan the travel around where the items will be. One way of reducing this stress is to look on line. Maybe you can purchase items on the net and they are sent right to your home. This reduces the need to travel, and the shipping cost may be cheaper than going to the mall, which include a meal, snacks, gas, etc.

3. This year make an effort to REDUCE the activities attended. Have each family member pick one or a maximum of two events to attend that really mean something. Make a plan and attend only these events. This can really make life easier.

4. Sometimes it's just better to SAY NO. Don't be pressured or guilted into attending an event. If the boss volunteers you to play host for the office party, then cut something else out of the schedule.

5. Holidays are a time of families getting together. It is also the best time to HOLD YOUR TONGUE. Family members are the best at knowing how to push the right buttons. Don't let little sister get your goat. Holidays are also a time of forgiveness. Remember, you can pick your friends, but not your relatives. If you don't have something nice to say...you know the phrase.

6. Now is not the time for a diet, but WATCH YOUR FOOD INTAKE. Holidays is the time for all the good treats, just know that sweets and fats decrease your feeling of energy. Look for some healthy alternatives for sweets. Maybe eat a healthy snack before going to that big dinner. This will make you feel better AND you won't feel so guilty.

7. KEEP UP THE EXERCISE. I know it's hard to "find the time" but if you're on a regular schedule at the gym, don't change it. Even if you can only take a walk around the block or down the road that is fine, just do not stop exercising cold turkey. This ties in nicely with the next item.

8. TAKE TIME FOR NUMBER ONE. Do take some time for you. Even if it is just 15-20 minutes during the day. This is the down time everybody needs. Listen to some music, read your favorite book, do a "me" thing.

9. **EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS.** This is especially important for anyone that has lost a loved one, gone through a divorce, or is alone for the holiday. Know that your feelings of sadness are normal. Don't try to convince yourself to be happy, just because of the time of year.

10. **BE REALISTIC.** Nobodies family is like the old TV shows. This is real life; there are everyday problems we have to deal with. Try not to panic, will it make a difference 20 years from now, if not, don't worry about it. It may make the holiday memorable. Sometimes we need a good laugh anyway.

11. This one can help the most. **TRY VOLUNTEERING.** Giving of oneself can make you feel better. Donating to a charity by volunteering or monetarily and seeing the joy this brings to others really helps. It is especially true if you cannot be with family during the holidays.

Finally, if you find the holiday feeling of sadness or anxiety lingers for more than a month. This may be more than just sadness; it may have developed into depression. A change in sleeping or eating patterns is something your doctor needs to know. Health professionals can give you useful tips for dealing with it in the future.

**ENJOY THE HOLIDAY SEASON.....** right! Well maybe with these tips it will be a little easier anyway.