

CARING FOR YOU

November 2007

Healthcare information from Dean Health System



Happy Healthy HOLIDAYS

The holiday season brings with it thoughts of glittering parties, elaborate feasts, and cozy family gatherings. But the holidays, from Thanksgiving dinner through New Year's Day, can also bring many emotional, psychological and physical challenges for which people are often unprepared.

"Religious and cultural holidays are significant stressors in our society," explains **Jocelyn Miller, PhD, Dean Psychology**. "Most of us feel as though we are 'supposed to' participate and those expectations, along with tense relationships, time constraints and feelings of loss, can lead to stress, anxiety and depression."

The following tips can help lessen holiday stress, making this time of year merry and bright:

Acknowledge and accept

Relationships present conflict throughout the year, but the tension is often heightened during the holiday season. Disagreements and ill feelings are fueled by the differing expectations and personalities of family members.

"If a family member is very competitive the rest of the year, we shouldn't expect that to change during the holidays," cautions Dr. Miller. "Try to accept family members for who they are, and interact with them in tolerant and positive ways."

Many times, feelings of loss and sadness are intensified, whether a family member has passed away or loved ones aren't able to be together. It is important to understand that all of these feelings are normal and that everyone is impacted differently by loss, says Dr. Miller.

Don't expect perfection

The perfect holiday images we hold in our heads are just that, in our heads, and stress can be relieved by eliminating expectations of what the holidays "should" be. This is especially important as families change. "Being open and honest about holiday plans ahead of time can be helpful, especially as children grow up and start their own families and traditions," says Dr. Miller.

Holiday television specials offer happy endings, but real life presents real challenges. Most people worry whether gifts will be liked or whether festivities

will go as planned, but these "what if?" scenarios create unnecessary anxiety.

Plan ahead

Most adults already feel stretched to the limit of their resources due to the demands of daily life. Add to that the extra food preparation, shopping, and traveling to be done during the holidays, and it can become overwhelming.

"Don't feel like you have to do it all yourself - ask for help," says Dr. Miller. "The holidays are not fun for the family if one family member is irritable and exhausted."

She suggests discussing with family members ahead of time what needs to be accomplished and dividing up the agreed-to tasks. It's also helpful to set a budget to avoid the post-holiday stress of debt and, if possible, devote a day or two early in November to tackling some of the holiday tasks.

Take care of yourself

"A key factor in maintaining good mental and emotional health during the holidays is taking care of oneself physically," shares Dr. Miller.

Physical activity can fight stress in addition to those holiday pounds. "Regular exercise helps the brain regulate moods and thoughts more effectively," explains Dr. Miller. "Plus, everyone benefits from movement and a change of scenery, so invite family members on a brisk walk around the block."

Perhaps the most successful way to avoid holiday stress, says Dr. Miller, is to remember the true meaning of a holiday. "Consider the depth of the holiday activities you choose rather than the breadth. It's important that however you celebrate the holidays, you and your family find satisfaction and peace."

If you feel persistently sad, anxious or hopeless and are unable to face routine tasks, and if those feelings last for several weeks, talk to your physician or a mental health professional.

For more information about Dean Mental Health services, please visit

www.deancare.com/mentalhealth

Keeping holidays happy for CHILDREN

For most children, the holiday season is filled with excitement and wonder, but it's common for kids to face holiday stress too. This time of year usually brings a drastic change in a child's routine, with altered meals and sleeping patterns, plus travel and family gatherings. Inclement weather and a busy social schedule can prevent needed physical activity that

allows kids to "let off steam."



"During the holidays, there tends to be a lack of structure and plenty of opportunity for overstimulation," says Dr. Miller. "It isn't uncommon for children to have difficulties with cranky or aggressive behavior."

Dr. Miller recommends that parents be flexible when making holiday plans for children, and keep in mind how the changes in routine might affect them. Making time for extended periods of play and relaxation will help, as will sticking to nutritious foods and regular bedtimes whenever possible.

And when holiday excitement crosses into disruptive overstimulation, "be prepared to intervene quickly when a child nears a 'meltdown' to help him or her calm down and regain control," says Dr. Miller. }

Urgent Care

For your convenience, Dean Urgent Care provides care for non-life-threatening injuries and illnesses that require urgent medical attention.

Urgent Care hours:

Monday – Friday: 7 am - 8 pm
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Dean Riverview Clinic and Urgent Care
580 N. Washington St., Janesville
(608) 755-3540

Dean on Call

For after-hours questions, Dean nurses are on call 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week.

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