

## Dr. McQuaid's Stress Cure Report

### Simple Ways to Beat the Holiday Blues

The holiday season is upon us and for many people it can be a stressful time. This year is particularly troublesome because of recent economic events. When you combine an economic contraction, tight personal finances, and the holidays, you have a recipe for stress, anxiety and depression. Well I have good news. It does not have to be that way. Christmas, Hanukah, and New Years can be happy for anyone willing to be proactive and it does not have to cost you any money. Overcoming negative emotions around the holidays can be accomplished by addressing the body, mind and heart. Here are some simple suggestions for eliminating the holiday blues.

For the body:

Get fresh air. Bundle up in some warm clothes and go for a walk. The walking is good exercise and the fresh cool air will keep you alert and provide oxygen. This also gets you out of the house and provides a change in scenery.

Avoid excessive alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant. It depletes the brain of serotonin, a chemical the brain needs to maintain normal mood. Therefore, getting drunk will only add to depression.

Pay attention to your diet. The holidays are a time for cookies, pies, and candy. However, if you are not careful with high sugar content food, you may cause unwanted anxiety. The reason is due to low blood sugar, a condition called functional hypoglycemia. Some people are sensitive to sugars and the body will overreact to cause the blood sugar to fall, not rise. The unintended consequence is depression and anxiety. One way to avoid this is to eat foods high in protein first, before you have any sweets.

For the mind:

Watch some comedy. There is no better stress buster than a good laugh. Laughing causes numerous health benefits and will lift your spirit. Watch your favorite re-run on TV, rent a comedy movie, or better yet, go to a comedy club. Laughing is contagious, so share your laughter with friends and family.

Deep breathing. One of the most basic techniques for coping with stress is deep abdominal breathing. Slowing down the breath cycle and increasing oxygen consumption are anti-anxiety processes. The easiest way to practice deep breathing is to place your hand below your belly button and feel your hand move with your respirations. Close your eyes and breathe through your nose pulling air down into your belly. As you breathe in say to yourself the word calm. As you breathe out say to yourself the word peace. Try this for three to five minutes and you will notice less stress.

For the heart:

Be kind. One way to reduce depression is to be kind toward yourself and others. Studies have shown increased levels of serotonin in the brain simply by doing something kind for another human being. The act of kindness shifts the focus off of you and on to something outside of yourself. It mitigates any self-pity and promotes happiness. It also is congruent with the holiday spirit of giving. There are countless ways to be kind. Helping an elderly person carry a package or contributing to charity, you get the idea. Just do it. You will feel better!

Attend a service. No matter what denomination you are, attending a service reduces feelings of isolation. Going to a holiday service will remind you that you are not alone. The incense, the music, and people coming together will buffer any feelings of isolation you may have.

You now have a list of proven ways to make your holiday season filled with joy. The approach is always through the body, mind, and heart. So this Christmas season take action and witness for yourself how much better you feel. After the New Year, keep it up because these recommendations will work for life.

Matthew McQuaid, DPM is a board certified foot and ankle surgeon practicing in Lakeport. He has a particular interest in mind/body medicine and is an instructor for the class titled Create Your Health at Sutter Lakeside Hospital Center for Health. For further contact phone: 263-3727.