

Checking your list . . .

The holiday season is often synonymous with frenetic energy, busy pace and high stress. For patients and practitioners alike, this time of year is often packed with holiday parties, shopping trips, school plays, travel, out of town guests, baking, cleaning, meal planning etc. . . all on top of regular daily activities. Add to this the increased availability of sugary snacks, higher propensity for drinking alcohol at social gatherings and the inevitable lack of sleep that comes with packing more activity into the day/night and you have a perfect storm for adrenal burn out.

The best present you can give to yourselves as well as your patients this holiday season, is the gift of good health. Here are a few important tips to follow during this busy time:

Breathe - Studies have shown that breathing exercises, specifically slow, deep belly breaths, increase parasympathetic activity which helps to decrease the sympathetic (fight or flight) response in the body. The holidays are an especially important time to stop and take a few minutes throughout the day to focus on breathing.

Say "no" - You can't do it all. Carefully choose the events and activities that have to be done or are really important to you and try to eliminate those that may be superfluous. Remember to choose what is right for you and not focus on the potential disappointment of others; you may be surprised to find that others may

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actually be relieved to remove something from their calendars as well!

Balance the sugar Allowing your blood sugar to fluctuate wildly only adds to the stress your body must deal with; avoiding the sugary baked goods that keep showing up in the break room, as well as ensuring that the increased demands on your time aren't causing you to skip meals, is important. Plan ahead. Make sure that you eat breakfast and carry healthy, protein containing snacks with you throughout the day. This will help you resist the "goodies" that are ubiquitous this time of year.

Supplement Instead of stuffing those stockings with chocolate and candy, consider making sure you (and your loved ones) are getting sufficient nutrients including those that are of particular importance to stress response and adrenal function: B vitamins, vitamin C, vitamin E and magnesium. Consider adding to this a blend of adaptogenic herbs for additional support in handling the holiday stress.

Slow down The holiday season is a great reminder to take the time to reflect on the past year, look forward to the coming year and, most importantly enjoy the present. Look outside; the natural landscape is likely quiet and withdrawn, the darkness comes early and our natural instinct is to curl up and relax . . . we just have to listen to our bodies.

So in addition to the presents to buy, the meals to prepare, and the parties to plan, add some of the items above to your "to do list" this season and encourage your patients to do so as well.

Resources

- PalGK, Velkumary S. Effect of short term practice of breathing exercises on autonomic functions in normal human volunteers. Indian J Med Res. 2004. 120 (115-121).
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- Johnston CS, Thompson LL. Vitamin C status of an outpatient population. J Am Coll Nutr 1998; 17: 366-70.
- McCarty MF. High dose pyridoxine as an 'antistress' strategy. MedHypoth. 2000. 54(5):803-807.

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