

## Best Tips to Reduce Stress and Anxiety During the Holidays

It's that time of year again: the holidays. We love them but it can be a very stressful time. I feel like the days just fly by between Halloween and New Year's Day. While the holidays can bring us wonderful moments with friends and family, they can also drown us in an overabundance of rich food, sweets, and a hectic social schedule.

Stress affects how fat and sugar are processed in your body. It also affects weight gain, heart disease, sleep, hormones, and DNA. It can shorten your life. So what do you do about it? If you weren't so stressed, you'd have time to relax and meditate!

Stress can sometimes lead to anxiety, which can trigger late night eating or just mindless eating that adds pounds and inches to your body. If this sounds like you, keep reading as I've got some great solutions for you to slow down, sleep better, and let go of that stress.

**Keep Up Your Routine.** One of the best ways to stay fit and healthy during the holidays is to keep to your routine as much as possible. Be sure to get to bed by 10 p.m. on the nights you are not out celebrating. It's much easier to pass up extra food if you are well rested. Get to the gym or do your workouts regularly. Remember, exercise increases your energy and reduces your cravings! I often see people throw out their whole routine from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, with the promise to start anew with a New Year's resolution. Heading into the holiday season with that attitude is a recipe for disaster. If you feel fit going into the season, and maintain your schedule as much as possible, your stress levels will decrease, and you'll be able to stay on track and maintain your weight and health goals.

**How to reduce your stress and anxiety.** Stop and breathe. Yes, it's that simple. When you feel yourself breathing in a stressful way, such as very shallow in only the upper portion of your chest, stop and notice it. Sometimes you may even catch yourself holding your breath. In that moment, stop whatever you are doing and take 5 deep belly breaths. Actually put one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest, then inhale while feeling your belly rise and fill with oxygen. Now release the breath fully and completely. Do this 5 times and you will start to engage the parasympathetic (relaxing) nervous system.

**Stress can trigger mindless eating.** First, figure out what your trigger is. Consuming sugar releases serotonin, the "feel good" hormone. So when you reach for the cookies, pretzels and such, you may be striving to feel happier in the moment. Before you reach for that next cookie, ask yourself if you're hungry or are you feeling you're lacking something and hoping food will fill it. The first step is to just identify the feeling that is triggering the eating. Identifying and acknowledging your triggers will help you to start shifting the behavior. When you are conscious of the connection between sugar and carbohydrates with serotonin and feeling

happier, then you can help yourself feel better by naturally increasing your serotonin levels by going for a walk in nature or having a laugh with a friend.

**Eat regular, balanced meals.** Start your day with breakfast within 1 hour of rising and include protein in that and every meal throughout the day. If you need a snack, pair it with protein. So an apple goes with nuts, nut butter, or cheese. Eating within 1 hour of rising gets your blood sugar in a normal range and will help your energy throughout the day. If you skip meals, you may over eat later in the evening. So eat at least 3, well-balanced meals through the day that include protein and lots of veggies. Keep refined carbohydrates to a minimum as they can trigger sugar cravings, which can be a very slippery slope.

**Limit your alcohol.** Save the alcohol until after you've eaten something with protein (nuts, turkey, cheese). All that sugar on an empty stomach will just spike your blood sugar levels. When your levels plummet, you'll end up ravenous! Alcohol also quiets your inhibitions (it's harder to say no to yourself) and that often leads us to mindlessly snacking on chips and dip ending up consuming larger quantities than planned. Remember to drink water between alcoholic drinks as alcohol is dehydrating.

**Get enough sleep.** Many people are running around sleep deprived and consuming massive amounts of caffeine to make it through the day. When you're sleep deprived you'll have less patience when minor issues arise making you short tempered and not quite the holly jolly soul that people want to celebrate with. Getting to bed between 9-10pm is ideal for your internal body clock. Have a wind down routine, lower the lights and get off the electronics. If you are a night owl, then just start by going to bed 15 minutes earlier per WEEK. Make it a slow transition and you will reap the benefits of a restful night's sleep. Keep the coffee consumption to before 11am to help with sleep.

Whether you are celebrating at home, with friends, or at a fancy cocktail hour, remember to focus on the people you are with and the conversation flowing around you. Enjoy the people you haven't seen all year and put your focus on finding out more about them and what they've been up to. Take a moment to be thankful and appreciative of all the abundance in your life. Put the spotlight on connecting with the important people in your life and the stress of the holidays will fade.