

Keeping Stress Out of the Holiday Season

The holiday season is upon us, along with everything that comes with it – decorations, celebrations, shopping, special meals, and for many, a big side of stress. According to a poll by the American Psychological Association, nearly a quarter of Americans reported feeling “extreme stress” come holiday time.

Cheryl Crowe is the Director of Behavioral Health Services for OSF HealthCare. She says stress unchecked can take people into an unhealthy downward spiral.

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Cheryl Crowe, Director of Behavioral Health Services, OSF HealthCare

“It leads us to some very unhealthy habits – we may not eat correctly, we may not take care of ourselves the way we do. It certainly impacts your cardiovascular system – your heart, your diet, your kidneys. We could be affected in many ways by stress, so it’s important to really address those issues and try to prevent them when you can.” (:21)

While the season is meant to bring feelings of love and cheer, during the hustle and bustle, it is easy to let the do-to lists get out of control and stress to skyrocket.

Crowe says the first step to avoid extra holiday stress is to manage expectations. Most of us don’t end up with the picture-perfect Hallmark holiday, and that’s okay.

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“Perfection is not necessarily the goal here. It’s the joy that we’re looking for. So as we try to push ourselves and we’re hyper-critical, it’s time to step back and say, ‘What did I want for this holiday? I wanted to be with my family and my friends – those connections. I wanted to have a good time. I wanted to celebrate.’ And that’s really the most important thing, not that perfect cake or perfect project or perfect window dressing. It’s really that celebration and that time together.” (:28)

The holidays are also a time when extended families gather. While this can be a wonderful thing, close quarters with relatives can bring on stress, especially when dissenting political or social viewpoints rule the conversation.

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“I think it’s important to sit back and understand that everybody comes from very different perspectives, and find a way to look for common ground in those discussions, and not engage somebody in a battle because as passionately as you may feel about something, they may be in a very different place.” (:16)

If the stress of the season are stopping you from functioning or feeling well, Crowe says it could be time to reach out to family, friends or a mental health professional.

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“If you are starting to feel like you can’t deal with daily events that’s a problem. If you’re starting experiencing excessive anxiety and depression, those may be some hallmark signs that you either need to reach out or may need some additional assistance, or you need to make some lifestyle changes.” (:18)

Crowe says there are a lot of resources in the community for people struggling with anxiety, stress and overall mental health. OSF HealthCare has a robust library of mental health resources that can assist you in finding the help you need.

OSF HealthCare also provides a digital tool called SilverCloud, which assists people in managing anxiety, depression, stress, or a combination of anxiety and depression. SilverCloud is free to access for adults – even those who are not current OSF HealthCare patients.

Visit OSF HealthCare-dot-org (OSFHealthCare.org) or OSF-dot-Silver Cloud Health-dot com, forward slash sign up (OSF.SilverCloudHealth.com/signup) to learn more.