

# Healthy Holidays

Holidays carry different meanings for each of us, and these meanings may change through time. The upcoming season may be something you look forward to or something you just want to survive. Either way, the holidays often bring additional stress and challenges to our health.

Holidays have a habit of happening to us if we don't take the time to get clear about our intentions. Take a moment to reflect on past holiday seasons.

- What was enjoyable?
- What was difficult?
- What particular needs or wishes may you have this year?
- What is important to you during the holidays?
- What are some ways you can be good to yourself?

## Common Holiday Pitfalls

### Diet

#### *Challenges:*

- Sugar. It suppresses the immune system, can cause anxiety and energy crashes, can feed into addictive behaviors, can contribute to depression and irritability and can exacerbate other health issues.
- Alcohol. It can interfere with sleep, mental clarity, and good decision-making. Many people have addictive issues or difficult associations with alcohol. It can negatively impact blood sugar and health in general.
- Refined carbohydrates (breads, pastas, cookies, cakes, etc). They are often devoid of nutritional value, can negatively affect mood, increase inflammation, cause cravings and overeating, cause blood sugar instability, and may be difficult on digestion. Some people have allergies or sensitivities to grains such as wheat or gluten that can cause a whole cascade of negative health effects.

#### *Strategies:*

- Be aware of what foods you are eating throughout the day. Make conscious choices.
- Plan ahead what treats you are ok with eating and in what amount.
- Eat regular meals with adequate protein and vegetables.
- Have regular protein snacks to help avoid impulse binging.
- Choose non-alcoholic, non-sugary beverages and drink plenty of water.

### Family

#### *Challenges:*

- Being around family can bring up pain, old patterns, helplessness, anger, new conflict.
- Being without family can echo loneliness, isolation.

#### *Strategies:*

- Redefine your traditions. You don't have to do what you've always done.
- Make your own celebration. Celebrate what feels important to you about this time of

- year. For example, renewal, hope, or setting intentions for the next year.
- Make plans with people with whom you can relax – if not on the holiday, then close to it. Stay in touch with your support systems – friends, counselors, etc.
  - Be clear about what your availability is for your family and maintain those boundaries.

### **Finances**

#### *Challenges:*

- Extra demands for travel, gift giving and decreased income.

#### *Strategies:*

- Determine a realistic budget and stick to it.
- Consider gifts of service, home-made items or a thoughtful written sentiment. Often these are the most appreciated.
- Reflect on the real meaning to you and keep that focus.

### **Stress**

#### *Challenges:*

- Loss of regular patterns, disrupted routines.
- Added demands with social activities, gifting, travel.
- Time pressures.

#### *Strategies:*

- Prioritize self-care. Exercise is great for stress-relief and improving mood.
- Maintain a consistent rhythm with sleep and meals.
- Leave time for the things you enjoy. Don't abandon hobbies or interests.
- Take space or alone time when needed.
- Yoga, meditation, prayer, saunas, massage, Epsom salt baths – schedule time for the things that work for you.
- Set clear intentions about the ways you would like to take care of yourself.
- Check in with yourself regularly and re-evaluate your needs.

**Best wishes for a happy, healthy holiday season!**