

Stress-Less Holidays

At this time of year we all begin to wonder how we are going to fit The Holiday Season into already full schedules! The question arises, “How can we make this a time for joy, togetherness, peace and happiness instead of one filled with deadlines, commitments, unmet expectations and heightened stress?” What can we do to create a different type of experience for ourselves?

As life becomes busier and more complex, it is easy to feel a loss of control of our time and energy. Often we feel the obligation and responsibility attached to events rather than being able to relish the experience and take pleasure in the moment. Outside demands seem to take precedence and we forget to take care of ourselves.

How can we turn this around so we can enjoy not just the holidays but our lives?

A first step is to identify what you need, and how much you can realistically give -- of your time, money, energy. The second step is to remain aware of your needs and ‘assets’, emotional and otherwise as you move through this season/day/life! Notice when circumstances are becoming overwhelming, and learn to say NO. It is not a kind or gracious act to give from an “empty cup”. This is a recipe for stress, resentment and blame toward others for taking too much.

Each of us must take personal responsibility to maintain our energy levels, schedules and balance. To do this effectively it may be necessary to look at the deeper roots of why self care is so difficult. Turn up the volume on the conversations that go on in your mind. We all have them...old messages & beliefs formed earlier in life. We usually are not aware that we carry perspectives that may be outdated, or that they may be influencing our behavior in a negative way.

Some of these ‘beliefs’ are probably good solid values. However, there are others that served well at the time, but need revision to fit effectively into our current life. Discovering and honestly acknowledging what thoughts, attitudes and beliefs are behind over commitment, hectic schedules and lack of time for oneself is one way to begin to design a stress-less holiday and perhaps a stress-less life!

It is also important to recognize what needs may be being met through these patterns. Our needs are not necessarily wrong but the way we are trying to get them filled may be ineffective. For successful change these needs must be taken into account and filled in positive ways. This makes it easier to release old habits.

More fulfilling choices for ourselves come from a clear recognition of how they affect our whole being. Would your life look different if you took into account how your decisions affected your heart and mind before you made them? We often run our lives from our heads, from the world of ideas, concepts, shoulds, oughts and musts. To sit quietly with a decision you are trying to make and notice how both your heart and mind respond to it can be enlightening. When there is a conflict between the mind and heart it is almost certain that there will be stress and eventually a variety of difficulties manifested in health, relationships and performance.

We can create lives that we love. However, we may need to create some changes from the inside out at the start!

Seven Strategies for Stress-Less Holidays

1. Define what it is that you want
2. Take a few minutes to prioritize what is important to you
3. Make realistic timetables; delegate; eliminate; pad time by 15%

4. Set up a plan to make sure you accomplish what you truly desire
5. Talk with family and friends -- enlist their support, poll them to see what they are willing to do to help, to cooperate
6. Keep your plan handy; look at it frequently to see if you are spending time doing things that help you toward your goals or are you being sidetracked.
7. Look deeper at why you may be trying to do too much, please others, or remain forever busy and over committed.

*What are some strategies that will build and maintain energy rather than destroy it?
How do we make sure that we experience the true meaning of the season?*

1. Give yourself some quiet time to relax/meditate, connect more deeply with feelings of peace, love, beauty. This practice builds energy and allows you to remain focused in the moment. It becomes easier to not be carried off by the stress, multiple demands, old patterns, & expectations. Daily meditation provides the space to develop the qualities of acceptance, inner peace and surrender. Development of these traits enables you to just let things be what they are instead of exerting futile effort trying to force events or people to be what you would prefer.

We all have idealistic pictures of things as they “should be“. Holidays aside, we do it in our daily lives. It just becomes more pronounced at Holiday time. The external world hardly ever matches inner expectations. We really do know this inwardly but resist, always hoping it can be different. If we learn to accept rather than resist, things have a funny way of working out -- often better than we imagine!

2. Get a massage. Relaxing the body can help the mind find ease.

3. Listen to music that relaxes you, makes you happy, picks up your energy when you are driving or doing mundane tasks. Also spend some time in silence, give yourself a break from constant input. Be aware of ‘aural hygiene’. There is a lot of stimulation coming at us constantly. We can monitor this making sure we have more of what feeds our energy rather than depletes it or jangles our nerves.

4. Decide how you can bring more peace and beauty into your life in small ways. Take charge of your every day environment so that it feeds your senses. Focus on bringing color, texture, aroma into your life. Move things around, change them frequently. As we acclimate, we no longer notice what’s around us.

5. Change small things: the way you drive to work; the side of the bed you get up on; where you have lunch; HOW you have lunch. This keeps us more present to our lives instead of slipping into numbness.

6. Make it a priority to involve yourself in and enjoy all your moments...being present is a gift you can give to your SELF!