

Get a grip on holiday STRESS

Holidays are a time of joy and family togetherness, right? Sadly, many of us feel more stressed at this time of year. It may help to remember that holiday tension is mostly tied to our expectations.

“Many people want to view the holidays as a special time and put too much stress on everything being perfect,” says Kimble Richardson, a licensed mental health counselor at the St. Vincent Stress Center.

Family can be a major stress trigger. If you have family members who don’t behave well to start with, they’re not going to change suddenly for the holidays. It’s best to limit the amount of time you spend with people who are difficult, says Richardson. If that’s not possible because out-of-town family members are staying with you, lay down your house rules at the beginning, he advises. “It takes communication; people can’t read your mind.”

Take time to prepare

Circumstance can generate—or aggravate—holiday stress, but there are ways to deal with difficult life events. For example, if there’s been



Feeling tense?

If you need help dealing with stress during the holiday season or at any time, call the St. Vincent Stress Center’s crisis line at **(317) 338-4800**.

a death recently in your family, Richardson suggests beginning new traditions that honor the memory of the deceased. If the issue is divorce and you have to see your ex-spouse, work out the details in advance. “The holidays shouldn’t be a time of surprises, so do it through a

mediator if you need to,” he says.

Be aware that money worries can come to a head during the holidays. “Start buying things ahead of time if you can,” says Richardson. “If you leave shopping to the end, you’ll probably spend more.” It’s sometimes better for family members to pool their money so everyone receives one group gift.

Don’t be a perfectionist

At home, involve everyone in preparations and tell yourself your house doesn’t have to look perfect, advises Richardson. Focus on your relationship with your guests, rather than on the appearance of your home, he says.

On the other hand, the source of your stress may be feeling obliged to attend a holiday party. If you don’t want to stay long, be sure to have an excuse for leaving. “It’s best to remain vague, and typically people won’t pry,” Richardson observes.

Parties are especially difficult for recovering alcoholics. Tell your hosts about your problem so they know the reason if you leave early. “Be a broken record,” adds Richardson. “You might have to repeat things.” ■

