

Holiday Stress

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Only 12 more days to Christmas' says the announcer on the radio. 'Oh dear' I sigh. My heart races; my muscles tense and I feel the beginning of a headache. What will I buy my uncle this year? Where will my brother and his family sleep when they visit? How will I cope with my parents-in law on Christmas Day? My house never seems to be clean enough for them. My mother-in-law always goes straight to the kitchen and starts cleaning. 'For many families holiday time, especially Christmas can be a time of great celebration as well as a time of stress.

Psalm 139 declares that we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (verse 14). God designed our bodies in a unique way. Our emotions and feelings alert us that something is happening and we can choose our response.

The physical sensations described in the opening paragraph are part of our stress response. In days long ago they alerted us of danger and prepared our bodies to face danger by fleeing, fighting or freezing. Today the challenges we face can be physical, emotional or relational. These may cause one or more responses in our bodies-the heart may beat faster, blood pressure may rise, the breathing rate may increase, muscles tense, digestion processes may slow, or thoughts race.

All these reactions make us aware that something is going on that we need to resolve. Stress is response to these things. We all react differently to people, situations, and events. In the example given earlier, being able to spend time with nieces and nephews could be an enjoyable experience. Having your mother-in-law visit, willing to assist with the household work may be a wonderful blessing.

When planning family gatherings or holiday celebrations it is easy to have dreams of 'the perfect day'. Our expectations can be unrealistic as we rush around trying to please everyone and complete all the preparations in time.

When Jesus visited the home of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), Martha was busy in the kitchen getting ready for their guest and feeling flustered and pressured. Mary was enjoying the company of Jesus.

Many of us can feel stressed at Christmas time. The world focuses on the outward decorations of the season. Our minds may remember past celebrations and try to duplicate the happy experiences of childhood. Our hearts may feel caught between satisfying the world's expectations and our own ideas of 'the perfect day'. Let us realize what is happening to us and concentrate on what God can do in us and through us when we celebrate his coming again this year.

Manage

To manage our stress response consider the following actions

-Be aware of what you are feeling-learn to listen to your body.

-Identify the reason for this response. Do you assume that others believe you are an inadequate housekeeper or do you think you should do everything yourself and not accept any help?

-Challenge unrealistic and unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. Others probably don't think of the tidiness of our home: they know you are busy and just want to be helpful.

-Change your thinking or behavior.