



From the Wellness Committee

Please enjoy this article from Falmouth's Community Wellness Committee

It's the holiday season again. You may hear yourself saying, "*I'm **not** going to get stressed out about the holidays this year.*" You probably heard yourself say the same thing last year. If so, you're not alone. There are a variety of reasons why your holiday season may not be all merry and bright.

Stress is the physical, mental, or emotional tension created by perceived challenge, demand, or threat.^[i] It's triggered when we perceive that demands exceed the resources we're able to mobilize.^[ii] Of course, it's not all bad. The stress response is automatic and designed to help us focus, alert us to danger, and keep us safe. It's a natural response in the body, often called the "fight, flight, or freeze response." However, it's not designed to be "on" all the time. Long term, too much stress may lead to disruptions in our well-being.

Some sources of holiday stress include a jam-packed social calendar, shopping, deadlines at work, loss of a loved one, sunless winter days, family dynamics, loneliness, a sense that you're doing too much or not enough, feeling left out when your spiritual traditions aren't the dominant ones, information communicated by the media, worry about a situation you have no control over, and on, and on... There's no avoiding stress! Events that trigger a stress response are different for each of us and the symptoms and duration of stress vary for everyone. It's important to identify and understand what causes your stress so you can proactively deal with your triggers. What might stress you out may be no big deal for somebody else.

Relieving stress is also different for everybody. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. What might work for one person may cause stress for another. Know what works for you. Some general guidelines are:

- Know your triggers, create a plan to address them, and share your plan.
- Attend to self-care basics which often get forgotten during the holidays– healthy eating, plenty of sleep, moderate exercise, taking a pause in your day to breathe!
- Have more fun! Is there joy, ease, and lightness in what you're doing? If not, change your perspective or change what you're doing. And practice smiling!
- Focus on what you can control. Let go of what you can't.
- Schedule outdoor activities for the middle of the day when the sun is brightest.
- Socialize, connect with others – call, phone, text, email, stop by a neighbor, send cards, hang out with a friend, etc.
- Solve "the" problem that's causing your stress.

- Try calming activities, such as reading, meditating, and gratitude journaling.

To create your personal **Holiday Stress Self-Care Plan**, consider the following format:

1. My **intention** for this holiday season is _____. [What do you want to move toward/create this year? Try to reframe your “don’t want” into positive statements; if you don’t want “X”, what do you want?]
2. One thing that gives me clarity, perspective and **replenishes** me faster than anything is _____. [This would be something to include in your plan!]
3. What **really matters** to me this holiday season is _____, and that’s worth my effort to make some changes.
4. The three things that **trigger** my stress response the most are _____.
5. **Actions** I can take to control or minimize my triggers are _____.

May you nourish yourself and others with loving-kindness and conscious choices that preserve peace, well-being and joy this holiday season!

[i] Mclean Hospital Newsletter, March 2022.

[ii] American Institute of Stress, www.stress.org

We at the Wellness Committee are interested in knowing what YOU do to reduce stress and find enjoyment during these troubled times. Perhaps it is spending time in nature. Enjoying family. Going to the movies. Exercising. Reading a good book. Eating ice cream... Whatever your preferred way to reduce stress might be, please send us your ideas and we will publish an article based on them! Send your thoughts to: Maggie Fleming (mfleming@falmouthme.org)