UNRAVEL Holiday Stress
Expectations, Perspectives & Deep Breaths

6 Early Bird Stress Busters from our friends at StressStop.com

Fantastic Foodie Fixes for a Healthy Holiday

SPECIAL FEATURE
Clinicians Under Stress in the Workplace
The mission of AIS is to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence of stress management in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Diverse and inclusive, The American Institute of Stress educates medical practitioners, scientists, health care professionals and the public; conducts research; and provides information, training and techniques to prevent human illness related to stress.

AIS provides a diverse and inclusive environment that fosters intellectual discovery, creates and transmits innovative knowledge, improves human health, and provides leadership to the world on stress related topics.
Contentment

We value opinions of our readers.

Please feel free to contact us with any comments, suggestions or inquiries.

Email: editor@stress.org

Editor In Chief: Daniel L. Kirsch, PhD, DAAPM, FAIS

Editor: Heidi Hanna, PhD, FAIS

Creative Director: Kellie Marksberry

Contentment is a quarterly newsletter published in March, June, September and December with news and advertising designed with the general public in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between stress and health because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. Contentment is archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

Copyright © 2014 the American Institute of Stress (AIS). All rights reserved. All materials on AIS’ website and in AIS’ newsletters are the property of AIS and may not be copied, reproduced, sold, or distributed without permission. For permission, contact editor@stress.org. Liberal use of AIS fact sheets and news releases is allowable with attribution. Please use the following: "Reproduced from the American Institute of Stress

AIS Daily Life Stress Board

Chaired by Dr. Michel Woodbury-Farina, the role of this board is to develop initiatives and communications to serve the stress management needs of all people.

Michel Woodbury-Farina, MD, FAIS
Cynthia Ackrill, MD, FAIS
Heidi Hanna, PhD, FAIS
Sandra Thebaud, PhD, FAIS
David Sollars, MAc, LAc, HMC, DAIS
Daniel L. Kirsch, PhD, DAAPM, FAIS
Take 5!
5 long slow breaths
(In 5, Hold 5, Out 5)
Start with one breath to settle, then ask yourself the 4 What’s and a Who Questions© during the next 4 breaths.
1. What is the DATA?
2. What STORY or EXPECTATIONS am I adding?
3. What’s NEEDED now? (What do I need or what does the situation need?)
4. Who do I want TO BE right now?

Forget perfection.
Stop obsessing over doing it all. The world is not going to end if the house is a little cluttered or dinner is on the table a few minutes late. "Focus your energy on enjoying the people in your life," says Donna Schempp, the program director for the Family Caregiver Alliance. Don’t sweat the small stuff and your holiday will be much more enjoyable!
Stay hydrated.
Brains lose efficiency before you even sense thirst.

Nourish your brain.
Think of fueling your energy with nutrients. Add in veggies, fruits, and protein before succumbing to the sugar abundance. Proactively carry snacks and use the 80/20 rule: choose healthy 80% of the time for optimal nutrition without feeling deprived.

Sleep and rest.
Only a few nights of inadequate sleep can mimic the deleterious effects of alcohol on the brain. Sleep is critical to learning and memory, yet during the holidays we tend to cheat the sleep and drink alcohol—not good for brains! Meditation or some form of mindful active relaxation* (not plopping on the couch, but purposeful mind/body decompression) can make a marked difference.

Exercise.
Exercise beats most medications in head to head trials. It is a key to stress reduction, emotional regulation, and neurogenesis—the growing of new neurons to meet our life challenges. Make it fun!

Just say, “No.”
We go overboard to please others during the holidays: shopping, cooking, sending cards, and attending every event. Instead, take care of yourself by saying no at least once—and maybe more.

Improve your mood with sunlight!
It stimulates the production of feel-good serotonin and also helps relieve seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which impacts millions of Americans every year.

To ease SAD symptoms, spend time outdoors or near a window on sunny days

Walk away from worries.
The rhythm and repetition of walking has a tranquilizing effect on your brain, and it decreases anxiety and improves sleep. Aim for a brisk, half-hour walk every day.
First we got your brain...

Now we need your heart.

Can we count on you for a dollar?

The American Institute of Stress helps people learn to manage their stress every single day. We help veterans returning from war find a sense of normalcy again. We help students who are stressed about exams, busy schedules and bullies reach their fullest potential. And we help people like you deal with whatever life throws at you! With your ongoing support, we will continue to be there providing people with relief for today and hope for tomorrow.

Click to Donate: Easy!

| Donation | $1 | $5 | $10 | $20 |

December 2014 CONTENTMENT
The American Institute of Stress
www.stress.org
GET INSIDE OUR HEAD

It’s Not Our Credentials That Make AIS So Impressive, It’s the Fellows That Go with Them.

The American Institute of Stress is a non-profit organization established in 1978 at the request of Dr. Hans Selye (the Founder of the Stress Concept) to serve as a clearinghouse for information on all stress related subjects. AIS Founding Fellows include:

Paul Rosch  Linus Pauling  Alvin Toffler  Bob Hope  Michael DeBakey  Herbert Benson  Charles Spielberger

Join our prominent psychologists, physicians, other health care practitioners and health conscious individuals who are interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

The American Institute of Stress invites YOU to enhance your credentials with FAIS and add your name to our Gallery of Distinguished Fellows.

Over the last 35 years, we’ve expanded our services and broadened our reach, but our dedication to science hasn’t changed a bit.

Our four focus areas include:

We produce three e-magazines focused on different stress related topics...

We are always looking for new contributors to our magazines. If you would like to submit an article, email your idea to editor@stress.org

Join us in our mission to Engage, Educate and Empower the global community with science based stress management information, tools and techniques so people can live happier, healthier and longer lives!

Visit stress.org to download your FAIS or DAIS application

American Institute of Stress
9112 Camp Bowie West Blvd. #228
Fort Worth, TX 76116

USA Main: (682) 239-6823
Fax: (817) 394-0593
Email: info@stress.org
HOLIDAY STRESS TO HOLIDAY... SPARK

By Cynthia Ackrill, MD, FAIS
The holidays bring joy to many, stress to more than 60% of us, and a combination to most. Emotions run high at the same time that our mechanisms for emotional regulation are compromised by the stress of overloaded calendars, work/life balance strain, and increased financial pressures, not to mention expectations based in long held beliefs and personal stories.

Americans report increased pressure from the sense of duty they feel to make the holidays special for their families, the continued strain of workplace demands, and the hype and commercialism of the season. Women and lower middle-income folks are particularly vulnerable, as are those already prone to seasonal affective disorder. Ironically many of our typical holiday habits undermine the brain’s coping skills—more empty calories and alcohol, less exercise and rest, excess spending, and too much or too little social connection.

Stress is defined as our reaction to anything we perceive as a threat to our safety or balance, or as incongruent with our expectations. Unhealthy or uncomfortable dis-stress occurs when we are constantly sounding a stress alarm in reaction to all of the big and little events of the day, creating toxic levels of stress hormones that wreak havoc on our productivity, health, and happiness.

There are 3 primary tactics to reduce the overwhelmed stress reaction system and thrive:

- Reduce the stressor load or exposure: Delete, delegate, and defer things off your list.
- Reframe your perspectives to reduce the emotional impact or significance of the stressors you can’t avoid.
- Build up your resilience with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual self-care.
1. Start by honestly examining your expectations. What really is the best holiday for you and yours—one that takes into account your values, your situation, your physical, emotional, mental, financial, and spiritual health? What old stories may be coloring your subconscious expectations? (“I need to make a Martha Stewart worthy dinner to prove my worth to my mother-in-law?—NOT!”) Which expectations could use a software upgrade?

2. Define what brings joy and meaning to your holiday. What are the key ingredients to a holiday of meaning for you and yours? What brings sparkle, deep fulfillment, and helps you thrive? Likely it is not the presents. Research shows that the happiness of a new acquisition lasts for a few weeks at most. What would create memories that will bring deep satisfaction or shared laughter for years to come? Align your to-do’s and activities with your core values.

3. Put the stressors in perspective. They are part of life. Be clear about what is in your control—sometimes it is only your reactions. Pause and choose your response. Make sure you have healthy boundaries.

4. Take care of your brain! Your brain’s frontal lobe helps you regulate emotions, prioritize your to-dos, and stay mindful of the meaning of the season, yet many of our holiday habits stress this vulnerable part of the brain. The good news: these same healthy choices take care of your body and energy as well!

5. Check your energy levels daily—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy. What do you need to do that day to be at your best? You may not have time for an overhaul, but so often a simple shift or 5 minute change can markedly improve your energy. Five minutes of deep breathing can reset your stress levels. A 15-minute brisk walk can clear your head or stave off a craving to dive into the sweets. Exercises that incorporate balance training also increase energy.

6. Practice Active Relaxation. Taking a daily break allows us to mind fully bring the brain and body back to their healthy balanced state. It can be accomplished in many, many ways and in just a few minutes: simple breathwork, repeating a mantra, guided imagery (download a podcast!), meditation, prayer, progressive relaxation. Whatever your preferred method, the one you enjoy and won’t
avoid is the practice that matters most. It resets brainwave patterns, heart rhythms, and cortisol (stress hormone) levels. Simply breathing in deeply and saying under your breath, “I have enough,” and breathing out, “I am enough,” can restore a sense of control and inner peace.

7. **Proactively decide your financial choices.** Discuss spending decisions and budget as a family or team. Try to reduce exposure to...ads and temptations. Recognize their power and create a mantra or reminders to stay with your plan, even when tired or stressed.

8. **Practice gratitude.** Set up rituals or reminders to intentionally practice gratitude. It is incredibly good for the heart, brain, and spirit. Simply writing down 3 things you appreciate each evening improves health and enhances sleep patterns.

9. **Practice forgiveness.** You don’t have to be a pushover to let go of old stories and wounds in order to focus clearly on the present moment. And don’t forget to practice this compassion with yourself!

10. **Practice giving to and connecting to others.** Nurture your bonds with humanity. It keeps you grounded in the greater meaning of the season. And if you are struggling and need the support of others...REACH OUT!!! You will bring someone joy trusting them to help you until you are ready to pay it forward. It’s one of the gifts of being human.

No matter what circumstances or challenges you face, every day offers another chance to discover which ways of being will bring you the energy and joy to really thrive. Live curious.

Here’s wishing you sparkle to give and receive this holiday season.
Many clinical professionals enter the ‘helping fields’ in order to be of service to others. Some literature has shown that the characteristics of those in the helping professions have been known to place the needs of others before their own (Davies, 2012). In addition to clinicians’ altruistic motivation to help, their primary goal often gets derailed by bureaucracy that causes stress. For the purpose of this article, stress is defined as the body’s reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental, or emotional adjustment or response (Morrow, 2011).

Health Problems

Clinicians who neglect self care and place their clients’ needs ahead of their own may be at risk for health problems. For example, stress has been known to have a correlation with conditions such as yeast infections, ringworm, ulcers, weight gain and even periodontal disease. When stress maneuvers the body from homeostasis to an state of imbalance, infections can develop from a weakened immune system. As stress increases, pH becomes unbalanced. Fungi grow in an acidic environment, which can overcome the person’s natural defenses that can lead to a fungal infection (Wu, 2011).

As for periodontal disease, stress produces cortisol which is generated as a result of the fight or flight mechanism in response to stress or fear. Once the body interprets that there is not an emergency to respond to, cortisol without an outlet can be result in periodontal disease and gum loss.( Bergland, 2013, Gutshall, 2007).

Compensation and Reimbursement

Besides the physical aspects of stress on the body, workers face additional factors that may make their profession challenging. Obtaining compensation for services rendered has the potential to create stress. For example, within behavioral health services, there is a high rate of no shows to treatment. According to one article, some clients that receive mental health services miss up to 20% of scheduled sessions. The reasons for this rate of absenteeism vary from lapses in memory, the client’s premature perception that they are doing better, which may lead the patient to feel they are no longer in need of mental health treatment, or the therapeutic alliance with their health care provider is not as cohesive as desired, which contributes to the rate of no shows (Mitchell, A., and Selmes, T., 2007).
Another factor that may cause stress in health care service delivery, is that some HMOs (health maintenance organizations) dictate treatment reimbursement by encouraging condensed services in a time frame that the clinician may not agree with, such as payment for limited sessions, despite the severity of the client’s issue or the clinician’s judgment of care needed. The outcome may become a moral, ethical, organizational, and business matter of how to adequately treat a client in the time frames allowed for insurance reimbursement.

Additionally, in behavioral health or addiction treatment facilities, some clinicians experience attitudes from clients towards treatment that are of entitlement. Ideally, clients would approach their treatment as an avenue to achieve either recovery from substances or mental health wellness. In reality, some clients attend counseling due to familial pressure, court mandate, child protective services involvement, or as a pre-requisite for a social service, versus attending for self help purposes. With issues of insurance constraints and client resistance regarding appointment absenteeism, many clinicians are facing stressful barriers before treatment even begins.

**Supervision**

It is assumed in a clinical setting supervision will help provide direction, feedback on client treatment issues and potential catharsis for the clinician. However, access to adequate supervision is not always available. For example, literature has recorded that some clinicians experienced little empathy and support from supervisors. Supervisees have sustained a lack of respect for differences and undergone an absence of praise for work completed or encouragement for efforts from their superiors (Watkins, 1997). With supervisory viewpoints such as these, it adds to the stress of meeting the demands of the client, while working within the confines of the workplace and insurance bureaucracy.

**Stress and Fatigue**

Over time, feelings of professional isolation could have detrimental effects both to clients being served as well as the clinician. One study among social workers found that 19% suffered from depressive symptoms, 16% considered suicide and 20% took medication for depression (Seibert, 2004). For clinicians that do not have an adequate outlet to manage workplace stress, the outcome could result in inattentiveness to tasks and potential malpractice.

Taking a more expansive view, it is not just professionals in the helping professions that may be overwhelmed and suffering from workplace stress. Some American workers in general, have to work years to attain benefits foreign workers currently enjoy. For example, an article published by the Economic Policy Institute stated that Austria, Germany, France and Sweden all have mandates that workers have up to 20 plus paid vacation days. The United States, however, has no similar requirement. This suggests that these countries realize that workers endure stress, and to become more productive employees, rest is required to be effective in their field (Allegretto, 2005).
Self Care

With the US having no official mandate requiring vacation time for employees, it is up to individual workers to find what is restorative from workplace stress for them. In a clinical setting, it may be helpful to prepare several strategies to manage stressors in an emergency. Adequate clinical support and supervision is strongly recommended. Develop good clinical relationships with experienced, compassionate coworkers whom you can debrief with after a crisis. Supervision may be ideal for some clinicians, but the reality is that it may not necessarily be available when needed. Due to some limitations such as mandated training, short staffing, and administrative responsibilities, it is not always possible to have access to supervision when required. This is especially true when working in some non-profit agencies funded by managed care.

One doctoral candidate described his experience of not having adequate supervision in an inpatient facility, then later had one of his clients commit suicide. The emphasis after the tragedy was not regarding how to assist the staff emotionally, but it was to defend against a possible lawsuit. In addition to guilt this clinician felt about the loss, he was unable to attain catharsis from his immediate supervisor. Instead, he was able to find support from the nurses on his unit (Greer, 2002).

Additionally, as part of self care it may be necessary for clinicians to reassess their caseloads (Wolfe, 1981). The clinician may need to consider, whether they have multiple clients that have a high level of difficulty? Are there too many trauma clients, or patients with low motivation? A high concentration of a clients with similar, challenging issues can lead to a depletion of the clinician’s energy reserves, and lack of objectivity.

Conclusion

Counseling is meant to be a helping and healing profession. However, it is the aim of most employers to stress productivity with the objective of financial success of the business. The stress of productivity can result in company goals that leaves its workers depleted, fatigued, and if proper support and supervision are not available, some employees may be forced out of the profession.

According to the Dept. of Labor, the number of psychologists is expected to grow 12% from 2012 through 2022. The number of master level clinicians, which the statistic identified as being Mental Health Counselors, and Marriage and Family Therapists is expected to grow 29% from 2012 through 2022. These numbers suggest that it is of great importance that current professionals perform at their highest level. Therefore, let it be your resolve to take care of your mental and physical health to the best of your ability!
References


Everyone has a different take on why the holidays are so stressful. For some it's too commercial, for others it's a lot of money and credit card debt, and for still others it's a painful reminder of a loved one who is no longer there to share it with you.

If there is one thing that sums up holiday stress it's having too much to do and not enough time to do it. When you start with an already hectic work schedule and add in the demands of holiday shopping, baking, entertaining, gift-giving, sending out holiday cards and spending copious amounts of money, you have a formula for a stressful December. This is one seasonal recipe you should try to avoid.

In November, I will try to spend two or three evenings (at least) shopping for gifts. Next year, think about spending just one evening in October, too. It's much more pleasant to shop before Thanksgiving when stores aren't as crowded and parking spaces are easier to find. You will really feel a lot more in control of your life if you can just knock off 25% to 50% of your Christmas list before black Friday comes a haunting. Plus, the more months you can spread your spending over, the more you will feel in control of your finances.

On one of those November trips I’ll pick out my holiday cards, wrapping paper and other odd items that won’t even be in stock by the time I get around to needing them. The real key here is to feel enough of a sense of urgency, so you don’t go to the store and drift off into analysis paralysis browsing.

Other things you can do ahead of time include hanging outdoor lights, getting cards ready, and purchasing and decorating the tree. I often get my tree on the Saturday after Thanksgiving and put it up the following weekend. This year Thanksgiving comes late, so I’ll probably just put the tree up when I bring it home and get the holiday season started a little early.
1. **Make a list of what NOT to do.** As you head into the holiday season there are probably numerous chores, errands and projects that don't need to be done now and can be put off until January when your schedule will open up. Whether it's cleaning up the garage, shopping for a new sofa (which wouldn't arrive in time for the holidays anyway) or painting the kid's bedroom, don't start any optional projects right now.

2. **Streamline what you dislike and savor what you love.** We all have things we love to do at the holidays and things we wish we didn't have to do. If you love making potato latkes or getting the Christmas tree - set aside time and make an afternoon of it. Get the whole family involved if you want to or just savor this activity yourself. On the other hand, if you dislike doing cards don't feel obligated to "keep up with the Jones." Just say no - or streamline the process - cut your list way down, get a simple card, sign it (No long notes!) and send it on its way (guilt-free).

3. **Find the true meaning of the holidays.** Whether it's attending services, donating toys and food, volunteering at a homeless shelter, visiting an elderly shut-in, or even watching IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, look for activities that give you an emotional and/or spiritual lift. Remember the word holiday is short for Holy day. Let this definition be a reminder of the true meaning of the season.

4. **To experience joy: allow extra time.** Time pressure kills joy. Be aware of how time pressure can turn a pleasurable activity like shopping or even going to a party into an activity that loses its fun-factor. Whenever you're feeling rushed, chances are you'll wind up feeling crabby and stressed too. Bottom line: Build extra padding into your busy schedule. If you think an activity will take an hour - allow at least two hours. I guarantee that if you follow just this one bit of advice, you'll experience more joy.

5. **Make a list and check it twice.** People are great at making lists but they rarely prioritize their lists. As a result, you wind up picking off low-priority tasks like vacuuming or raking leaves and not leaving enough time for high priority activities like spending time with family and friends. If the holidays seem hollow, check your priorities and see if the things that are really important to you are at the top of your list.

6. **Allow time for yourself.** Don't forget to allot some time every day (even if it's just a half hour) to recharge your own batteries. You can't make anyone else happy if you are feeling miserable and stressed inside. Give yourself permission to go for walk, exercise, take a bath, listen to music, enjoy a leisurely cup of tea or do something just for the fun of it.

For even more advice on how to enjoy the holidays visit our website at www.StressStop.com. From all of us at StressStop.com we wish you the happiest of holiday seasons and a lot less stress in the new year.
Just when you think your life is stressful enough, the holidays arrive, adding an additional layer of stress to our already busy lives. Our calendars become packed with parties, shopping, celebrations, cooking, cleaning and spending time with loved ones. With all these extra demands on our schedules it can be hard to find the time to eat healthy, which may be why so many American’s find themselves gaining a little (or a lot of) weight between Thanksgiving and New Years. It doesn’t have to be this way though. With a little bit of planning and just one hour of “food prep” in the kitchen each week you can set yourself up for a whole season of healthy, enjoyable and stress-free meals!

Here are 5 steps to help you prepare.

Step one: It's all about the "healthy" grains
Personally, I always love to have healthy grains like brown rice, millet, buckwheat, and quinoa on hand because they can be incredibly versatile as well as healing to the body. Take brown rice for example, which is high in soluble fiber so it’s slower to digest. Fiber has a stabilizing effect on our body which helps to sustain blood sugar levels, energy, and mood. My only complaint when it comes to brown rice is that it can take up to an hour to make and who wants to wait 60 minutes for your meal to cook these days? You can avoid the wait time by preparing a big bowl of brown rice ahead of time, which you can then turn into a number of healthy dishes throughout the week in under 10 minutes. Try dishes like stuffed peppers, stir fry and even fish tacos!

To prep your brown rice you’ll take 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth for every one cup of dry grains. For example, if you have 4 cups of dry grains you’ll use about 8 cups of broth. Combine together in a large pot over high heat on the stove. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer. Cover and let cook for 60 minutes. Once your rice is done, let it cool and then transfer to a large bowl and store in the refrigerator.

Step two: Start with the most important meal of the day
All those years your mom told you breakfast was the most important meal of the day?
day, she was absolutely right! But we're not talking just any old breakfast; you want to have a breakfast that is high in protein and healthy fat. Why? The combination of proteins (like pasture raised eggs, grass-fed beef and raw nuts and seeds) and healthy fats (like avocados and coconut oil) is what our bodies need to produce sustainable energy and to help keep our cortisol levels down. In a season that can place extra stress on our bodies, this is one of the best things you can do to truly start your day off right and give yourself an added boost!

A simple and delicious idea for a "protein packed" breakfast is to make an egg bake and then each morning you can serve it with a side of avocado for your healthy fat. Once your brown rice is on the stove and simmering you can start your egg bake, (see recipe at left) which only takes about 10 minutes of prep time and each week you can use different veggies to mix things up and keep it fresh.

**Step three: Prep your veggies**

How many times have you gone to the health food store or farmers market and spent loads of money on fresh organic produce only to find that by the end of the week you've consumed maybe 5% of what you brought home? It's happened to me more times than I like to admit and only because at the end of a busy day the last thing I want to do is prepare my vegetables, even if it does only take 10 minutes. This is why I always recommend to wash, clean and cut all your veggies ahead of time. While your brown rice is simmering and your egg bake is cooking, go back and look at what meals you're planning to make for the week and take the next 30 minutes to prepare your veg-

---

**Easy Egg Bake**

Ingredients
12 pasture raised eggs
2 carrots, chopped
2 zucchini, diced
1 sweet yellow onion, diced
1 container of organic mushrooms, chopped
Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375 degrees and grease a 9 x 13 baking dish.
In a large bowl scramble the eggs. Add the carrots, zucchini, onion, mushrooms salt and pepper to taste and combine the mixture well.

Transfer to the baking dish and place in the oven. Cook for 45 minutes. When done, remove from oven and allow to cool before covering and storing in the refrigerator.

**Almond Butter Cups**

Ingredients
1 cup almond butter
4 Tbsp coconut oil
1 Tbsp coconut manna, melted
1 Tbsp organic honey
1/4 tsp Himalayan pink salt
1 bar of 70% or higher organic dark chocolate
about 2 dozen small baking cups

Wisk the almond butter, coconut oil, coconut manna, honey and salt together in a large bowl. Place your baking cups on a cookie sheet and spoon the mixture evenly into each cup. Using a knife you can cut your chocolate bar into the desired number of pieces you need, or using a meat tenderizer or rolling pin, you can break your chocolate bar into small pieces and then sprinkle them over your almond cups. Store in the freezer until ready to eat.
gies accordingly. If you've decided on stir fry and stuffed peppers, dice some onions, carrots and mushrooms and when you're done place them all into separate containers to help them stay fresher longer and to prevent them from getting soggy or spoil ing. When it comes time to make dinner all you have to do is remove your containers from the fridge, grab a handful of whatever veggies you'll be using, heat and serve. It's that easy!

Adding more veggies to your diet is one of the single best ways to detoxify your body. In a season that's full of heavy foods, it can be really easy to throw our digestive system off track. You can help to keep your system running smoothly by aiming to get in at least 2 servings of vegetables a day.

**Step four: Always keep a snack on hand**

Snacks are so important and yet often times they get forgotten about when it comes to creating our weekly meal plans. Keeping snacks on hand and learning to eat small meals every 3 hours will not only help you keep your energy high and your cortisol levels low, it will also help you to ensure that you don't show up to your next holiday gathering famished! When we're hungry, we're more likely to overeat as well as choose foods that may be higher in fat and empty calories like breads, crackers and sweets.

A really easy snack idea is to simply take 5 or 6 different varieties of raw nuts and seeds like almonds, walnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and flax seeds. Mix them together and add some dried mulberries, which have been shown to have a slight sedative effect on the body and can help to calm anxious nerves; a necessity during the holiday season!

Once you've combined all your elements you can place the mixture into a mason jar to help keep it fresh throughout the week. The process takes less than 3 minutes to do and you end up with a high protein snack that you can keep at your desk or throw in your purse or car when you're on the go. You'll never go hungry again!

**Step five: Don't forget about dessert**

Have you ever noticed that "desserts" is "stressed" spelled backwards? Coincidence? I think not. In times of stress it's very common for people to crave desserts, especially desserts that are higher in calories and sugar. Now if you're anything like me, I absolutely love the holidays, but there is no doubt it can bring with it more "to-do's", more family pressure and more temptation, all of which equals MORE STRESS! This is why I always recommend to be prepared and make sure you have a healthier dessert on hand for those days or nights you need something a little sweet but don't want to over indulge on the 3 c's; cakes, cookies and candy. One of my favorite desserts to have on hand is almond butter cups (see recipe at left) and they only take 5 minutes to make.

This holiday try to remember, overeating one day won't make or break your eating plan and it certainly won't make you gain weight! It takes days and days of overeating to gain weight, which is why having healthy and delicious foods on hand and ready to go can be a real blessing to your sense of sanity and your waistline. If you over indulge at a holiday meal, put it behind you and return to your usual eating plan the next day without guilt or despair.
Not a subscriber?

Have “Contentment” delivered to your inbox each quarter!

The American Institute of Stress
6387B Camp Bowie Blvd #334
Fort Worth, TX 76116
www.stress.org
info@stress.org
Main: (682)239-6823
Fax: 817-394-0593

The American Institute of Stress is a qualified 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.
ISSN # 108-148X