

## OLDER AND WISER: The holidays are joyous ... and stressful

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Don't be a turkey – take care of yourself this season. photo supplied Pixabay

Taking care of ourselves during the holiday season can be tricky.

How can we make it through the season without getting too stressed, eating too much and neglecting good habits such as staying on a regular exercise program?

At this time of year seniors may be more at risk for increased stress than a younger person.

There is the stress of getting everything done in addition to the usual daily activities. There is the stress involved in planning and hosting dinners, buying gifts, decorating the home, sending out greetings to friends and family – the list goes on.

Studies have shown that high levels of stress are linked to conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system. As older individuals are already more susceptible to these health problems, managing stress levels becomes even more important.

Proper self-care could be the gift you give to yourself. Try to take a few moments for yourself, take a nap or a bath, and be thoughtful about the many activities you might engage in.

Make sure you get a good night's sleep.

Seniors also deal with many other issues that could contribute to stress. For instance, older people at this time of year might be lonelier as they don't have the usual distractions and routines to cope with being alone – seniors' centres are open less often (although they do their best to accommodate seniors), friends might be less available or out of town visiting family, and events may be harder to get to because of mobility issues.

Some seniors also can't visit far away family as travel becomes difficult as one gets older. Some seniors may also be coping with the recent loss of a loved one with whom they had shared many of the Christmas traditions. Seniors may be experiencing some feelings about their end of life – will this year's season be the last?

If you are a mobile senior perhaps reach out to a friend or friends who might be sharing your loneliness at this time of year and invite them over, or organize to take a taxi together to a concert or holiday gathering.

You could also volunteer a bit more, which will get you socially connected and out of your own space. Social connectedness is one of the main keys to well-being for a senior. Assisting a senior at this time of year could be your gift to them. Caregivers, who are often carrying an extra burden at this time of year, may need some extra support as well.

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When it comes to eating during the holidays we are all tempted by the delicious food choices available and it's easy to go overboard. But for those of us trying to keep a handle on our diet, or managing our health (high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.), it can be a difficult time.

Try some of these tips from Consumer Reports' November 2018 issue on health: Stock your fridge with healthy alternatives like vegetables and fruit so you have healthy choices. Freeze some of the gifts of food people bring – we don't have to eat them right away. Make sure to eat a healthy breakfast every day. Skipping a meal can backfire since later we may over eat because we are so hungry. Start with a glass of water before a dinner, or a party, and consider switching a glass of water for that second and perhaps fourth drink. Try eating the healthy appetizers and avoid the fried foods. Eat veggies first at a meal and make some simple swaps. Eat a roll and butter but not the stuffing, or vice versa.

Try to stick to good eating habits and when tempted remember the maxim that "moderation is best." For instance, scan all the cookies on the tray, but choose a favourite or two.

Events are wonderful at this time of year. But if there seems to be too many don't be afraid to say no to some of them. Let your daughter or son cook the turkey dinner this time even if they do it at your place.

Don't forget your exercise program – it may be harder to keep this up with time pressures, but it's still vital in keeping you less stressed. Take a walk between dinner and dessert which helps you sneak in some activity. If you're shopping maybe park farther away from the store entrance or walk around the mall a few extra times.

Take care of yourselves – it's the right thing to do.

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