‘Tis the Season... ...for Anxiety and Stress

For many, the biggest source of holiday stress is family—the family dinner, the obligations and the burden of family tradition. “But that doesn’t mean that the solution is to skip the holidays entirely,” says Ken Duckworth, MD, medical director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

What about the holidays get you down? Once you cut through the vague sense of dread about family gatherings and identify specific problems, such as unhappy memories, toxic relatives, etc., you can deal with them directly.

Holidays can make people feel out of control. We feel at the mercy of our relatives or steamrolled by the sheer force of family tradition. But you have a say. The key is to take some control over the holidays, instead of letting them control you.

If you enjoyed the holidays differently this year, what would happen? Be conscious about what you are doing. Don’t unthinkingly do things the same way just because that’s how you always do them. If the old holiday traditions aren’t working, if they’re not making you happy and causing holiday stress, it’s time to do something different.

Tips for Beating Holiday Stress

Once you’ve taken a clear look at the holidays—about what works and what doesn’t—it’s time to make some changes.

Here are four key don’ts for the holidays:

• Don’t do the same old thing. Too overwhelmed to host the dinner this year? Discuss other possibilities with family members.

• Don’t expect miracles. If your holiday anxiety stems from a deeper history of family conflict, don’t pin your hopes on leading family members to big emotional breakthroughs. Focus on your own state of mind and confront difficult issues during a less volatile time of the year.

• Don’t overdo it. Pace yourself. Long before the family gatherings actually happen, decide on some limits and stick to them. For example, drop by a holiday party for a few hours instead of staying all night.

• Don’t worry about how things should be. Don’t compare yourself to the idealized notions of perfect families and perfect holidays. In fact, most people have less than perfect holiday gatherings.

Depression During the Holidays: Getting Help

Don’t write off signs of serious depression as mere holiday stress. While holiday stress may be seasonal, depression can be year-round. If your holiday anxiety seems severe or is interfering with your job or home life, talk to your doctor or to a counselor.

R. Morgan Griffin, Home for the Holidays

Earliest Melanomas Found by Dermatologists

Studies show importance of full-body skin exam

If your doctor recommends a full-body skin cancer exam, get it. Results from two separate studies show that when dermatologists routinely perform this non-invasive exam on their patients, early melanomas are found. More than half (56.3%) of the patients in one study were not even aware that they had a suspicious spot or growth.

American Academy of Dermatology Association

Have a Ball!

What could be better than working out with a piece of equipment that’s versatile, convenient, and inexpensive? That describes exercise balls perfectly. Good for both beginners and advanced exercisers, these big, heavy-duty, inflatable balls—also called Swiss, balance, fitness, therapy, stability, or physio balls—are found in many gyms and physical therapy offices and are easy to use at home. Working out on a ball can increase your range of motion as you stretch, and improve balance, agility, posture, and coordination.

Berkley Wellness Letter

Virgin Olive Oil for Healthy Hearts

Cooking with oil is much healthier than other cooking oils because of its monounsaturated fat content, which can help lower total cholesterol levels. Here are some tips on choosing an olive oil:

• In a study, virgin olive oil appears to have the greatest benefits for a healthy heart. Virgin and extra-virgin had more antioxidants than refined olive oils.

• Before buying, check the packaging date. It should be no more than one year old.

• Choose a lower-cost olive oil for cooking and opt for quality, more flavorful versions for using over salads.

• Olive oils have a shelf life of about one to two years. They are best when stored in a dark, cool place.

Olives101.com

Bulletin Board

Make holiday gift-giving safe! Go to: www.preventblindness.org/children/safetoys.html for a checklist of safe toys and toy selection guidelines.