

Stress

Health & Wellbeing

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Stress is an inevitable part of life and has been given some negative press in recent times, however life is really rather uninteresting and uneventful without it. Managing stress, and hence feeling some sense of control over the situation, is a matter of having appropriate coping strategies and supports in place.

Stress pushes us to find internal strength and resolve that we otherwise may never have known we possessed, and to go on and achieve things we may not have known we were capable of. It cultivates the 'strength of character' that Australians are known for. Think of Gallipoli and Kokoda and the reputation that our bravery and mateship created. It is through life's greatest tragedies that we achieve our greatest triumphs and rewards. The phrase 'nothing worthwhile comes easily' springs to mind.

Christmas is typically one of the most stressful events of the year with the financial pressure of buying gifts, the heightened emotions of family members and friends coming together and the pressure of organising special traditions and food. Some practical suggestions for managing the 'Christmas stress' could include budgeting for Christmas gifts and phone call expenses. Work out how much you can really afford to spend before you arrive at the shops with all their clever tactics to encourage you to part with your hard-earned money. If you have a large circle of extended family or friends to buy gifts for, it may be worth discussing this with them and suggesting buying presents only for the children, or having a 'Kris Kringle' where everyone draws a name and buys a present for only that person, or setting a limit on the cost of presents.

To ease the stress and improve the success of Christmas shopping, make a list of gifts you would like to buy before you go shopping. Don't rely on inspiration as you could be wandering aimlessly around the shops, and consider buying a few extras like chocolates just in case you forget somebody or have unexpected guests bearing gifts. You could also consider buying gifts over the internet or through mail catalogues.

To reduce the stress of Christmas lunch, consider eating out at a restaurant or cafe and remember to book well in advance. If staying home, keep food simple. Delegate tasks such as setting the table and housework, and consider having a buffet where everyone brings a dish.

Anxiety, depression and relationship stress are heightened at this time of the year. So remember that if you are feeling this way, these feelings are normal and are shared by many. Try to avoid known triggers that create arguments. For example, either avoid touchy subjects or quickly change the topic. Plan fun family activities after lunch, such as a good game or outing.

Good coping strategies to manage general stress at a physical level can include getting enough sleep, having a balanced diet to provide good nutrition, and incorporating some kind of regular exercise routine. Exercise provides a stress outlet and also helps to produce positive, 'feel good' endorphins (brain chemicals). At a mental level, avoid comparing yourself with others. Do your best within the context of your own life circumstances. Set yourself realistic personal goals, expectations and standards. Practice positive and encouraging thinking, being supportive and gentle with yourself. Learn to read your feelings (label the feeling you are experiencing), as this can help you decide what action you need to take to help improve things. Our negative feelings create signals that tell us that something is wrong; don't ignore them. Try to express emotions in an assertive, controlled manner rather than suppress them. Assertive communication - involving the feelings and needs of all parties being expressed in an atmosphere of mutual respect - is the foundation of good relationships.

Even with all the rush and stress of the festive season, most of us agree that it is all worth it to experience and share the joy of this time of year with those around us. I wish you all much relaxation and happiness.



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