

*Holidays are meant for the **HEART**, Not **HEART ATTACKS***

3 Simple Steps to Reduce the Effects of Holiday Stress

The merriment of the holiday season often takes an unpleasant turn due to a statistical anomaly which surfaces during Christmas and the new year. An unfortunate relationship exists between the holiday season and an increase in heart attacks for both men and women. According to a study from the Journal of Circulation, *"The number of cardiac deaths is higher on December 25 than on any other day of the year, second highest on December 26, and third highest on January 1."* No family wants to look back on any festive time with memories of stress and sadness due to a heart related incident during the holiday season. Increased education and understanding about the correlation between the holidays and heart incidents serves to provide a more joyous and fulfilling holiday season.

Everyone knows that December usually brings about an increase in stress. **An increased risk of heart attacks stems from the added pressure of buying gifts, financial strains, and increased consumption of sugar, salt, and alcohol.** Most people will not suffer a heart attack but will still acknowledge that their stress levels increase during this time of year. People whose bodies enter the holiday season in a state of high stress due to high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and poor overall health become that much more susceptible to a heart related incident.

An initial step towards better health begins with acknowledging and recognizing some inevitable stressors which come with the holidays. Avoid adding guilt and stress by planning ahead to begin or maintain an exercise regimen in advance of some of the extra eating and consumption that will surely take place. Map out a budget which works both in advance and following the holidays to cushion the concerns that come with credit card and bank worries during December and January. Do not allow destructive stress to breed and accumulate during a time meant for peace and harmony.

The most important aspect of day to day health does not come from simply making a conscious decision to arbitrarily lower stress. Some measure of stress remains inevitable and unpreventable. The key to staying energetic, healthy, and sane during and after the holiday season revolves around improving the body's ability to cope with stress. **Limiting sugar overload and alcohol consumption certainly help in that pursuit but maintaining a body capable of managing stress needs to be a top priority for all people.**

Chiropractors take a unique approach to health, disease, and stress. While some health care professionals emphasize changing the environment to suit a person's already weakened body, Chiropractic focuses on strengthening the body to confidently face any environment. Three simple and effective ways to increase the body's ability to deal with and mitigate effects brought on by stress include:

- 1) Chiropractic – Scientific evidence proves that Chiropractic adjustments increase the body's ability to better deal with and conquer stress. A key indicator to lowering stress while improving health and longevity comes from an increase in heart rate variability. A Chiropractic adjustment, particularly in the upper neck, improves heart rate variability according to a **2013** study from the **Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine**.
- 2) Sleep - Get at least seven to eight hours of sleep per night as a vital component to off-setting the effects of stress. A key to getting adequate sleep starts with getting to bed on time. Proper sleep combined with Chiropractic adjustments help balance the nervous system and improve body's adaptation to stress.
- 3) Water - Thirst often comes disguised as hunger. Many people assume they are hungry when the body simply wants a healthy dose of water. Increase water intake throughout the day to suppress unnecessary urges to eat. Water consumption will help avoid an increase in blood sugar (and waistline) and prevent a sugar overload that hinders the body's ability to heal, adapt, and rest.

Understanding some of the stress triggers of the holiday months allows people to make proactive decisions to enjoy better health during the season. Heightened awareness combined with a few simple strategies will help limit and avoid increased occurrences of stress and allow fulfilling time with friends and family to be the only memories worth remembering.