

# Counsel On Aging

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The holiday season can be a stressful time for everyone, including older adults. Like the need for exercise, our bodies have a need for regular relaxation. The fast pace of modern life combined with worries about politics, crime, inflation, or illness can keep a person tense and stressed most of the time. And unless a person can regularly unlock and release that tension and stress, it can greatly increase our risks of developing heart disease, cancer, and other chronic illnesses. In addition, being relaxed is a lot more fun than being worried, uptight, and tense.

Stress can make a person "age" faster. In people prone to ulcers, stress wears out the stomach. In others, it may damage the heart, lung, skin, or muscles. Few people die of "old age." Instead they die because their hearts and other vital organs just wear out. How fast they wear out has a lot to do with how much stress a person has and how well he or she can deal with it.

The human body is equipped to respond to stress. When a person is challenged or threatened, his or her body goes through a series of changes that prepare the individual to either fight the threat or run away from it.

The fight or flight response is made up of the following bodily changes. The heart beats faster to pump more blood to the lungs, brain, and muscles. Blood pressure increases. Muscles tense to prepare to fight or run away. Digestion slows—butterfly feeling in the stomach—so energy can be used elsewhere. Perspiration increases as the body tries to cool itself. The skin turns pale as much of the blood flow is directed to the muscles. And, the pupils of the eyes dilate and hearing becomes more acute so that the individual sees and hears better. Additionally, hormones are released that cause an older adult to feel tension, anger, or happiness.

When a person really needs to get away, this stress response is truly a miracle of survival. Today, however, our tensions are most often caused by things such as time pressures, loneliness, loss of a loved one, or fear of the future such as retirement and health problems.

When a person makes an important decision, copes with a difficult situation, or even looks forward to an exciting event, the body processes automatically prepare the individual for action with the stress response. When channeled into productive activities, the stress response motivates a person to get things done and helps deal with unexpected situations. But if a person feels stress too much of the time and can't cope with it effectively, the body will be constantly tensed up with no release.

While exercise is the most natural way to change from stress to relaxation, other techniques can help an older adult relax. Breathing is the key to life. Full breathing is a good way to reduce tensions and to feel relaxed. Although proper breathing is a learned skill, it is not difficult to master. Also, progressive muscle relaxation is an easy way to deal with muscle tension. The relaxation response is a simple meditation procedure to counteract the stress response.

Stress in and of itself is not bad. Without some stress and change, our lives would be quite boring. Stress only becomes harmful when we let it get out of hand. If we can't fight it, run from it, or react to it in some other positive way, stress can become distress.

All of us will be involved in many different activities during this holiday season. We'll join the crowds as we shop for that special gift and battle traffic when it's time to go home. For others, this may be the first holiday season to be alone in years, as a spouse has died.

For whatever reason, Thanksgiving and Christmas can be distressing. Older adults are not immune to the stresses of life.

And, for sure, being relaxed is a lot more fun than being worried, uptight, and tense—and others will enjoy being with you a lot more.

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<b>Coca-Cola Classic</b> Diet Coke, Sprite No Return 2 Ltr. <b>129¢</b>	<b>Kohler Choice Roast Beef</b> Sliced To Order Lb. <b>489¢</b>	<b>Butterball Turkey Breast</b> Sliced To Order Lb. <b>479¢</b>

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<b>Del Monte Corn, Peas Or Green Beans</b> 16-17 Oz. <b>99¢</b>	<b>SuperMoist Cake Mix</b> Betty Crocker <b>69¢</b>	<b>Red Emperor Grapes</b> Lb. <b>79¢</b>
<b>Bounty Paper Towels</b> 70 Sq. Ft. Roll <b>199¢</b>	<b>Betty Crocker Cake Mixes</b> 18.5 Oz. <b>69¢</b>	<b>Yellow Onions</b> 3 Lb. Bag <b>99¢</b>
<b>Crisco Shortening</b> 48 Oz. <b>199¢</b>	<b>Maxwell House Coffee</b> 16 Oz. Bag <b>299¢</b>	<b>Fresh Coconuts</b> Ea. <b>59¢</b>

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## 'Tis Season For Extra Moderation

As families and friends gather for the holidays, many will be toasting and drinking to each other's health. According to Dr. Roy Mathew, director of Duke University's Alcoholism and Addictions Programs and professor of psychiatry, alcohol flows more freely during the holidays.

"People have different concepts of celebration. Unfortunately, our country has a belief that getting drunk is a form of celebrating," he said. "I think one of the reasons that people drink a great deal in the bars and at parties is that it gives them confidence and makes socializing easier."

In addition, studies show heavy drinkers think alcohol makes them more likeable, sociable and smarter, Mathew said.

Drinking is influenced by other factors, such as the extent a culture or religion approves of the practice, the availability of alcohol, a person's neurological makeup and personality, and stress at the office or at home.

Depression is one personality component that becomes more significant during the holidays, Mathew said.

"Christmas is a time when you are reminded of a number of things—of better days gone by, of all the things you don't have or of having lost relatives during the year. People who are depressed feel their depression more acutely when they compare themselves with other people around them who are having a nice time."

"Then, of course, there is the post-Christmas depression," he said. "You are aware one more year is gone. You have spent money you don't have. You have gained a few pounds, and your visitors have left."

Someone who is depressed should not turn to alcohol, he said, because alcohol is a depressant and will only intensify depressed feelings.

A majority of those who drink during the holidays are social drinkers who, unlike alcoholics, can control when they drink and how much. However, Mathew said, some social drinkers and teetotalers may engage in "binge drinking," in which they consume unusually large quantities of alcohol, such as during the holidays.

"It is a form of alcoholism. Many with each binge lasting longer," Mathew said.

"Because of our philosophy of celebrating, it is difficult for those who are trying to quit drinking, especially alcoholics."

"Hosts and hostesses can make the situation easier by not serving alcohol or by offering non-alcoholic drinks at parties," Mathew said.

"But alcoholics also have a responsibility."

"First of all, they have to remind themselves that sobriety is their number one goal," he said. "They should be aware they may be tempted by alcohol or pressured to drink. They should plan how they will deal with those situations before they encounter them. For example, they could leave a party early if they are tempted to drink, or, if they receive a bottle of liquor as a gift, they could give that away to someone else. Boredom also can create problems for alcoholics during the holidays, so they should plan their days in advance."

Those drinking at parties should know their limits.

"The number of drinks required to get you drunk varies from person to person," Mathew said. "You should not drink on an empty stomach, you should not drink to inebriation, and you should not drink if you are taking medication."

The legal limit at which a person can be charged with driving while impaired is 100 milligrams per 100 milliliters of blood.

"The average person reaches that limit after drinking three to five beers, three to five glasses of wine, or three to four shots of hard liquor," Mathew said. "However, individual functioning is impaired before that limit is reached. Studies have shown that truck drivers could not drive as safely after only one or two drinks—and the alcohol gave them a false sense of their abilities."

If someone exceeds his drink limit while at a party, he has several options to driving home drunk, Mathew said.

"The old remedy of drinking coffee doesn't work. If you are drunk, get somebody who is not drunk to drive you, take a cab or spend the night. The last thing you want to do is to kill or injure an innocent person or hurt yourself, especially during this season."

"That could be your Christmas present to other people—life."

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