

December 2010

## December: What Holiday Stress?

### Alcohol and Stress: There are Safer Ways to Cope

Not everyone drinks in response to stress. A number of factors, including genetics, usual drinking behavior, experiences with alcohol or other drugs, and social support, help determine whether a person will drink during a stressful situation.

What is it about stress that makes some people turn to alcohol? Does alcohol help you relax, or can it make matters even worse? What else can you do to cope during a stressful situation?

### Drinking in Response to Stress

Stress is not just the psychological feeling you have after you bounce a check or lose your job. Stress is a physiological response to certain stressful stimuli, including illness, injury, extreme temperatures, and fear.

When your body perceives or experiences stress, it responds by secreting hormones into your blood in an attempt to cope with the stressor. This stress response affects the way your body functions and alters your body temperature, appetite, and mood. This is one reason some people turn to alcohol after a stressful event.

People who do not have the resources—such as a social support network—to cope with stress are more likely to drink in response to a stressful situation. They use alcohol to help buffer the effects of the stressor.

Alcohol is not a healthy way of dealing with stress. Drinking to deal with stress can interfere with work, relationships, finances, and lead to more problems, like alcoholism and health complications.

If you find yourself in a stressful situation, it is important to have coping strategies that do not involve drinking. Symptoms of stress include feeling tired, headaches, stomach aches, and having difficulty sleeping. To reduce or control the stress you are experiencing, Mental Health America recommends the following strategies:

Learn to say no.—If you are overwhelmed with responsibilities, make a point not to take on more than you can handle.

To read the rest of this article, navigate to the link below.

**Source:** Author: Krisha McCoy, MS

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[http://ahealthyme.epnet.com/GetContent.aspx?deliverycontext=&touchurl=&CallbackURL=&token=c0a17ee7-2798-4d59-b6b4-743fc6002965&chunkid=44834&docid=/healthy/mind/2003/alcohol\\_stress](http://ahealthyme.epnet.com/GetContent.aspx?deliverycontext=&touchurl=&CallbackURL=&token=c0a17ee7-2798-4d59-b6b4-743fc6002965&chunkid=44834&docid=/healthy/mind/2003/alcohol_stress)

### How Stressed Are You?

Did you know that there is a Stress test on the ahealthyme.com website that provides you with a better understanding of how much stress is affecting your life?

The 25 statements in the test are arranged in groups of three, and you should select the one answer which best reflects your situation. The test has a corresponding point value. When finished, the test taker can examine their score interpretation and read their Personal Scale Score. Please keep in mind that this is a general assessment of your stress levels. Further and more in-depth assessment may be obtained from your health care or mental health care provider.

The test can be found at the link below:

<http://ahealthyme.epnet.com/GetContent.aspx?deliverycontext=&touchurl=&CallbackURL=&token=c0a17ee7-2798-4d59-b6b4-743fc6002965&chunkid=21276&docid=/hic/stress/assessment>

### Frequently Asked Questions

*Can stress cause backaches?*

Stress can make you more likely to get a backache. Also, reducing stress can help you recover more quickly from a back injury. But, be careful not to blame back pain on stress, because you may be overlooking a serious cause.

It is important to see a doctor right away if:

- Your back pain extends to the buttocks, arms, or legs
- You have weakness or numbness in your arms or legs
- You have any loss of bladder or bowel control
- The pain wakes you up from sleep

*Can exercise help reduce a person's stress level?*

Yes.

Research has found that there are mental health benefits from exercise, including reduced stress and increased confidence for those who exercise regularly -- even 20 minutes a day. Exercise helps you improve your overall health. It also reduces your risk of developing chronic (life-long) conditions such as heart disease, and may help prevent dementia and some forms of cancer.

**Source:** Authors: Melanie Haiken and Elaine Herscher

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<http://www.ahealthyme.com/topic/adam1002140>  
<http://www.ahealthyme.com/topic/stressill>

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### Tips for Reducing Stress in Your Life

Stress—we have all felt it at one time or another. But, many people feel stress often. Some even feel it as a part of their daily lives. Stress can contribute to numerous conditions, like coronary artery disease, stroke, immune disorders, gastrointestinal problems, eating problems, sleep disturbances, and sexual problems. Learning to reduce your stress can help you live happier, healthier, and maybe even longer.

The National Mental Health Association offers the following tips for reducing or controlling stress:

**Be Realistic**—Do not take on everything; learn to say no. Set realistic goals for yourself. If you are feeling overwhelmed, try eliminating an activity that is not absolutely necessary. Ask yourself, "What really needs to be done? Is the deadline realistic?" No one is perfect, so do not expect perfection from yourself or others.

**Meditate**—It only takes about 10-20 minutes to get a benefit from meditating. These few moments of quiet reflection may bring relief from stress as well as increase your tolerance to it. And it is simple to do: sit quietly, listen to peaceful music, relax, and try and think of pleasant things or think of nothing.

**Visualize**—Take a moment to picture how you can manage a stressful situation more calmly and successfully. This can work with just about anything, whether it is an important presentation at work or moving to a new place or taking an exam.

**Slow Down**—When you start to feel overwhelmed, try taking one task at a time. Make a list of things you need to do. Put the most urgent task at the top. Once you have accomplished it, cross it off and move on to the next one. The positive feeling of crossing things off can help keep you motivated.

**Be Active**—Regular exercise is a great way to reduce stress, and it benefits the body as well as the mind.

**Get Involved in Hobbies**—Take a break from the stressors of life and do something you really enjoy. Try gardening, painting, or reading. Schedule time to indulge your interests.

**Practice a Healthy Lifestyle**—Eating healthfully will make a difference. Avoiding things like smoking, excessive alcohol, and caffeine will help, as well.

To read the rest of this article, navigate to the link below.

**Source:** Author: Mary Calvagna, MS  
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<http://ahealthyme.epnet.com/GetContent.aspx?deliverycontext=&touchurl=&CallbackURL=&token=c0a17ee7-2798-4d59-b6b4-743fc6002965&chunkid=8912&docid=/healthy/living/2002/reducestress>

### Free Stress Resource Guide

Found on [mybluehealthma.com](http://mybluehealthma.com) under the resources tab, members can read and download

*"Roadways To Healthy Living: A Guide For Effective Stress Management"*.

This 92 page guide is aimed at effectively managing stress in healthy ways, including exercise, meditation, and relaxation. Managing stress is one of the most important things you can do for your health. This guide is based on over 25 years of scientific research on valuable information about the most powerful strategies that you can use to learn more about your stress and how to manage it effectively.

### Healthy Recipe: Sweet Potatoes with Cranberries & Pecans

Ingredients:

2 tsp. canola oil  
2 tsp. maple syrup  
1/8 tsp. cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1 medium sweet potato- peeled, cut into 1/2" slices  
olive or canola oil spray  
1/4 cup pecans, chopped  
1/4 cup dried cranberries

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Place potatoes in medium bowl. In small bowl, whisk together oil, maple syrup, cinnamon and salt. Pour onto potato slices and toss with spoon to coat evenly. Coat small casserole dish with oil spray and layer with half of potatoes. Top evenly with half pecans and half cranberries. Cover with remaining potatoes. Sprinkle remaining pecans and cranberries on top of potatoes. Cover and bake for 30 minutes, or until potatoes are tender.

Yield: 4 servings  
Each serving provides:  
Calories: 150  
Fat: 8 g  
Protein: 8 g  
Carbohydrates: 20 g  
Protein: 2 g  
Fiber: 3 g  
Sodium: 164 mg

**Source:**  
<https://www.mybluehealthma.com/Portal/Resources/Recipe.aspx>