

HOLIDAY STRESS GOT YOU DOWN?

by Marie Coady

It's Christmas Eve and there you are, the last one in the store and you still have three gifts to buy - and one of them is for your mother-in-law. The girl at the checkout keeps glancing at her watch and the floor manager is standing by the door ready to lock up for the night. But you can't leave that store until cross every name off your list. Is that what's getting you down bunky?

Christmas is a time of fellowship and good cheer, but for some the stress of Christmas can be overwhelming. Trying to keep a sense of humor may be impossible in light of work, social and family obligations that seem to multiply like lemmings at this time of the year.

Well, here are some warning signs that may prevent you from ODing on stress this holiday season.

You know you're in trouble when you build a snowman on the lawn, it comes alive and is caught peeking in neighbors' windows.

Your co-worker keeps singing Adeste Fideles over and over again - and she knows all the words.

You finally locate that toy your grandchild wants so desperately, but the guy in the trench coat will only accept cash. So you rush to your bank and get in line at the drive thru only to find you're behind a loan applicant waiting for his three day approval.

You go to the supermarket for milk and head for the speedy checkout only to find the line so long the store has provided a Mariachi band to entertain you, and while you shift from one foot to another, the guy behind you asks you to dance.

You decide you need cheering up so you head for Boston to see the lights on Boston Common, and when you emerge from Park Street station you find a gauntlet of hollow-cheeked homeless people begging for food.

You make it through that gauntlet in one piece only to be accosted by religious fanatics proclaiming you are damned to spend eternity in hell if you don't shave your head and wear a sheet draped over you while chanting some strange phrase (which translated means: Give me Money).

You finally locate that sweater your daughter wanted so badly but learn the only color they have left is fluorescent orange.

Your relatives from California decide they want their family to experience a white Christmas and show up on your doorstep Christmas Eve - all fifteen of them.

You try to return that expensive present you impulsively bought for your now ex- girlfriend and find you can't return it for five business days. Now you can't tip the paperboy.

Is that what's bothering you bunky? Well, before you head for the bell tower with a cache of automatic weapons and a year's supply of armor-piercing bullets, consider this: You are not alone.

Holiday stress afflicts millions. But the good news is that a thirty-five year study shows there is no link between suicides and holiday depression. Sigh!

But Joyce Ritchie, a South Bend, Indiana woman came up with a solution. She claims the key to surviving the holidays is to BE NATURAL, and even made up this cutesy way to remember it.

B -- Breather deeply, it will help increase energy levels.

E -- Exercise: 20 minutes a day, three times a week -- and racing from errand to errand doesn't count.

N -- Nutrition: Three well-balanced meals each day.

A -- Attitude: Negative attitudes are contagious and destructive. Try to see the glass as half full.

T -- Time Management: Set priorities and don't take on more than you can handle.

U -- Uniqueness: Recognize and treasure your own uniqueness. Say 'no' when necessary.

R -- Relaxation: Private time to read or listen to music -- a time not to focus on the next item to do.

A --Associations: Maintain contact with nurturing support systems -- colleagues, friends, family.

L -- Laughter: Still the best medicine.

This only proves I was right about Indiana. I lived there for a short time when I was a teenager and always believed those people had too much time on their hands.

So if Joyce Ritchie's solution fails, try to at least recognize the warning signs that will bring on a full-fledged Christmas panic attack, like when:

You leave cookies out for Santa and next day you find crumbs in your bed.

Your prudish Aunt Mildred brings a rum cake for desert, but you discover she drank most of the rum when she makes a pass at Father Bob - while he's leading grace.

Your neighbor's house is so outrageously decorated people come from all over New England to see it - and turn around in your driveway.

You find out there really is a Santa Claus when you wake up on Christmas Eve to hear his reindeer pawing and prancing on your newly tiled roof, and to add insult to injury, Rudolph flicks his tail leaving behind an aromatic present.

You decide to have a Christmas Eve party and it's so successful your guests decide to form a conga line and snake through your condo development. Next day you receive a registered letter asking you to vacate.

Your out-of-state relatives, all twenty-seven of them, decide to say Merry Christmas ---- collect.

Your house is picketed by animal rights activists, because you have one of those lighted deer on your lawn.

Your eccentric cousin Rolf gives your teenage son a subscription to Penthouse.

You are looking forward to Post Holiday Blues.

Is that what's bothering you bunky?

Well never give up and never give in. Keep your chin up, your back straight and face life head on. March to your own drummer. Be a leader. And while you're at it, look over your shoulder. There's an army of fellow sufferers following behind.

Merry Christmas!!!