



Chronic Pain and Women's Health Newsletter

How to Tame Holiday Stress



The holidays should be a time of joy and special

memories. However, after dealing with all the extra activities related to them such as visiting family, cooking, and shopping, most people get very stressed with all the demands on their time and energy. When a person has chronic pain, these demands can be overwhelming. Pain makes even everyday tasks such as housework and shopping difficult to accomplish. The added burden of standing in long shopping lines, cooking for holiday

meals, and intensive cleaning for company can be overwhelming for someone in pain.

The stress of dealing with the holidays can aggravate chronic pain conditions such as fibromyalgia and TMJ jaw pain. Standing for long periods of time and carrying holiday purchases can aggravate neck and back pain. Juggling all of the extra tasks during this time can intensify migraines and headaches. How does a person with pain survive all of this?

First, realize that you don't have to get everything done to enjoy the season. Look at all the

things you have to get done and do only those that you can reasonably accomplish.

Second, it is crucial to take time for yourself, even if you feel you don't have the time. If you do not care for yourself, you do not accomplish tasks efficiently. You will get more done in a shorter period of time if you are rested and feel good.

Third, once you have eliminated the tasks you don't need to be doing, break down the remaining items into smaller "to dos". Then you can accomplish much smaller bites of a bigger project.

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Myofascial Release (MFR) for Treatment of Pain

Myofascial Release (MFR) is a form of hands on treatment that is very effective for chronic pain problems. It uses sustained pressure to affect restrictions in the fascia (connective tissue), allowing for the release of restrictions that cause pain.

Fascia is a three dimensional "web" that exists as the supporting framework of muscles, tissues, and cells. It is throughout the body and affects every structure.

In a normal, healthy state, fascia has a wavy structure, allowing for un-

restricted motion and function. When the body has been injured, this fascia tightens like a band and becomes inflexible. This produces excessive pressure on pain producing structures in the body such as muscles and nerves.

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Special points of interest:

- ☉ Stress Busters
- ☉ MFR Effective Treatment for Pain
- ☉ Research Findings for Bladder Control
- ☉ Your Questions Answered

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Myofascial Release cont...

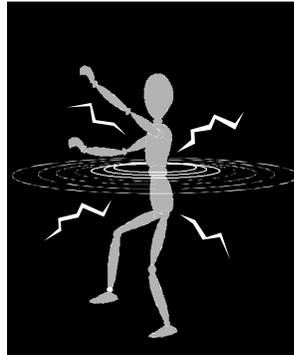
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Without removal of this pressure, the body cannot heal and pain persists.

Common tests such as x-rays, CAT scans, and MRI's do not detect fascial restrictions. If a person does not have a fracture or cartilage damage that would show up in the tests, they may still have pain producing restrictions in this fascial system that are not detectable by current testing procedures. This can lead to frustration in getting treatment and pain can turn into an ongoing problem.

Treatment of the fascia can affect long standing, debilitating pain. Unlike massage, which only affects

the muscles, treatment of the fascia addresses the deeper structures causing the pain. MFR is very gentle and tolerated well by people in pain, yet it is extremely effective as it treats the root



MFR can dramatically improve pain.

of the problem.

MFR treatment has been successful in treating a variety of chronic pain problems including neck and back pain, fibromyalgia, TMJ (jaw pain), headaches, migraines, scar tissue adhesions, and pelvic pain. It is often beneficial even if the person has been in pain for many years. When combined with a personalized rehabilitation program including specialized stretches, strengthening exercises, and posture retraining, people can successfully re-

Tips and Tricks: Dealing with the Holidays When You Hurt

1. Drink plenty of water. Hydration allows your brain to function optimally and helps flush toxins from your body. Aim for at least 6-8 8 oz glasses of water. Keep it close by and take sips throughout the day. Caffeinated beverages such as coffee and tea don't count!
2. Break down your holiday "to do" list into manageable bite-size pieces. Start as early as possible by making a
3. list of things you want to accomplish. Then do a little each day, instead of waiting to the last minute to get everything done.
3. Keep a list of things you need to do or get with you at all times. That way if you are already at the store for something else, you have your list with you and can save time by picking up things you need for your holiday shopping while you are there.
4. Instead of spending time standing in lines, consider other options. If you already have a list of things that need done, you may be able to have a friend or family member help as they are doing things for themselves. Another great option is ordering items online. No standing and waiting in line and the items can even be delivered straight to the intended recipient with no handling on your part.

Research Shows Effectiveness of Physical Therapy for Bladder Control

Several studies have shown the effectiveness of physical therapy treatments for bladder control problems. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews published a recommendation for treatment of urinary incontinence. They concluded that pelvic floor muscle training was more effective than no treatment, or inactive treatment.

The Cochrane Database compiles the best available research on different medical topics and then issues guidelines based on the best avail-



Physical Therapy effective in treating bladder control problems.

able evidence for treatment effectiveness.

The recent 2006 publication was an update of treatment guidelines published in 2001.

They concluded that pelvic floor

muscle training

should be included in first-line conservative management of incontinence.

Pelvic floor muscle training is a safe and effective treatment for bladder control. The use of biofeedback, a way to visualize the muscle activity of the pelvic floor allows for improved outcomes.

The pelvic floor muscles are not visible muscles and are difficult for a person to train on their own. A Physical Therapist specializing in treatment of incontinence can help by utilizing biofeedback and other techniques to enhance the effectiveness of pelvic floor training.

Holiday Stress Cont:

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Fourth, make time to exercise. "I don't have time" is not a good excuse. Exercise is shown over and over in studies to have many benefits including improving energy, decreasing stress, and improving health. It also releases endorphins, the "feel good" chemicals that help decrease pain and improve mood.

The good news is that any exercise is better than none. Even 5-15 minutes of moderate walking is helpful. Just pace yourself and do only as much as you can. You can even do several short bouts of exercise during the day. Activity of this type will

allow you to feel better and get more done.

Fifth, make sure to breathe. Stop periodically during the day, especially whenever you feel stressed, and take several deep breaths. This signals your nervous system to relax. Muscles will loosen and stress will decrease. The increased oxygen to your

brain and body will help you function optimally.

For people in pain, pacing yourself is a critical life coping strategy. Focus on only important tasks, break them down, take time for yourself, exercise and breathe! This year's holiday season will go more smoothly with these strategies.



Don't try to do too much during the holidays. Pace yourself!

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I am so overwhelmed with everyday tasks due to my pain that I can't even begin to deal with the holidays.

A: First realize that all of the extra things we feel we have to do for the holidays are just that- extra. Even some of the everyday tasks we feel compelled to complete may not even be necessary. Stop a moment and look at all you feel you "have to" accomplish. Some of these tasks are essential, but others are just ones you feel you "need" to do. For example, many people feel they must bake cookies

for the holidays. If you step back and truly evaluate this "need" you may see that either buying some or foregoing them altogether (less calories to land on your hips!) may be acceptable alternatives that allow you to not get so overwhelmed.

Take care of yourself first, then do only the tasks you feel up to doing.

How do I get everything done when I hurt?

Q: My TMJ (jaw pain) and headaches get worse during the holidays. Why is this?

A: Stress is a common trigger and intensifier of pain symptoms. This is especially true for TMJ and headaches. These conditions are aggravated by muscle tension which is common when one is experiencing stress. The holidays are typically VERY stressful times. This also goes for any big event such as a wedding. On the downside, things such as divorce,

a job loss, or a death in the family also aggravate these conditions.

The holidays are easier to deal with as they are a planned event. Evaluate your "to do list" and see if there are ways you can simplify your tasks. Don't be afraid to re-evaluate your priorities and cut out the less important tasks.

Stressful events such as death or a job loss, (or even just having a bad day at work!) can be harder to deal

with as you have no control over them. You can only control your reaction to them in such a way as to minimize your pain levels. Make sure to take time for yourself and breathe deeply when you feel overwhelmed. Give yourself permission to cancel all non-essential tasks to allow yourself to be able to cope with the added stressors in your life.

For further tips see:

Volume 1 Issue 1 for headache tips

Volume 1 Issue 2 for stress tips

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The content of this newsletter is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose or suggest treatment for individuals. Please see your health care provider regarding your specific needs.

Fibromyalgia
Chronic Pain
Headaches
Bladder Control
Pelvic Pain
TMJ (Jaw Pain)
Osteoporosis
Biofeedback
Tai Chi, Pilates, Yoga
Manual Therapy