

'Tis the season to be stressed out, so take some steps

Feel free to sing along. The holidays can be anything but jolly — let alone be a vacation. Without a plan to handle the extra to-dos between now and the end of the year, they can impact your health.

We often place undue stress on ourselves this time of year in an attempt to create some sort of perfect "Hallmark" holiday for ourselves and our families. Not only does "the season" start earlier every year, but it also seems there are more and more festivities planned. There are work, church, school and community obligations to meet. And one of the first things often pushed aside is the commitment to take care of ourselves — to eat right and be active.

There is food everywhere, not just any food, but the "good stuff" — sweet and tempting. Who wants to get out and exercise when you can stay in and watch holiday reruns or football bowl season marathons? Being healthy is frequently the last thing on

HEALTHY BOTTOM LINE



Mick Bates

our minds this time of year. Yet (you knew there was a "yet"), immediately after we take down the tree, we come up with our New Year's resolutions. Does this make any sense? Not to

me and to anyone who wants to enjoy the holidays — not just this year, but for years to come.

So it's time for a new approach. Like most things in life, a sane approach is not all black and white. The key is not all or none, but trying to find a balance between enjoying this time of year, not enjoying it so much or trying to make it the last "indulgence" before the infamous resolutions go into effect.

Did you know that the top four New Year's resolutions are: quit smoking; lose weight; get healthy; and start exercis-

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ing? In my next column, we'll talk more about that, but until then, here are a few tips for healthier holidays.

1. Look ahead and be realistic about what you can achieve between now and the first of the year. Make a commitment to yourself to continue the healthy habits you developed over the year. Avoid "back sliding" from the things that have been working for you.

2. Reflect on last year's holiday season. Identify what worked, what went well, what didn't and where you wound up overdoing (or underdoing) it. Stick with your proven strategies. Consider new ones that will address your difficulties so you won't make the same mistakes this year.

3. List all the things that

you need to do and put them on a calendar so you get a visual representation of what your holidays will look like.

4. Put the big rocks in first. Start with those things that are "musts" or fixed commitments. Say "no" to things on your list that you don't really want to do — and don't need to do. Sometimes less is more.

5. Plan at least one day each week to do nothing. Rest is important. Being tired and strung out isn't the best way to enjoy time with friends and family, let alone get off to a strong start in the New Year. (Remember, even the Creator took a day off.)

6. Plan at least two days a week to do something physical. Being active gives you energy to do more and feel better

about your lazy days; it also jump-starts your metabolism to burn off some of that holiday cheer.

7. Plan one day to do something new — something that you've never done during a holiday season. Traditions are important, but it's also good to do something different. Try something new to make this Christmas special and stand out from all the others.

Finally, keep it all in perspective. Find a little balance between rest and reward, activity and relaxation, togetherness and quiet time — and the holidays can enhance your mental and physical health.

From my family to yours, we wish you the very best over the Holy season — and a happy, healthy, prosperous 2010.

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