



Does Stress Affect My Respiratory Status?

Everyone knows that even though the holiday time is fun and festive, it can also be extremely stressful. How does this added stress affect your respiratory status if you are already compromised with an illness such as COPD? Studies dating back to the 1950s through today all indicate there is a definite link between stress and self reported colds and flu. For example, studies have shown that family stress is associated with higher incidences of respiratory infection.

Sometimes our relationships can help when stressful situations arise in our lives. They can help promote healthy behaviors that in turn promote resistance to infections, such as abstinence from smoking and regular exercise. Healthy relationships can also help buffer us from the emotional and psychological effects of stress.

However, when the demands of life exceed your ability to cope, a psychological stress response is triggered. Often time this period of stress leads to feelings of helplessness and sadness or fear. These states alter our immune function and consequently put us at a higher risk of developing infection and illness when exposed to infectious germs.

Behaviors often associated with stress can also leave us more susceptible to illness, such as

smoking, poor diets and poor sleeping habits. Other habits such as drinking caffeine, washing hands and using mouthwash may also contribute to whether we do or do not become ill when exposed to these infections.

Studies have shown that increased epinephrine and norepinephrine are linked to increased risk for infection. These hormones are released when our body experiences stress.

So what are the things that we can do as individuals to help prevent our bodies from becoming infected with the flu and other infections due to stress (especially during the holidays)?

- First and foremost, take the flu vaccine every year!
- Plan a budget that includes both gifts and travel and then stick to it!
- Focus on one thing at a time. Make a list of all of the tasks that you need to accomplish and then mark them off your list when completed. Take one thing at a time rather than focusing on the entire list at once.
- Simplify! If you feel you are being pulled in too many directions, prioritize and cut back on all your outings.
- Say No! Don't let anyone guilt you into doing more than you feel you are capable of. Manage your time.



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- Hold your tongue. Holidays are a time with family and all of the drama that goes along with it. Practice forgiveness and accept your family members for who they are. Set the good example.
- Watch what you eat. The more fats and sugars you eat, the more run-down you feel. Instead, fill up on healthy snacks before you go to a holiday party.
- Break a sweat! Exercise is one of the best ways to deal with stress. Maintain your normal diet during the holidays and try to adhere to your normal exercise routine.
- Set aside some “me” time. You need a minimum of 15 minutes every day to kick back and relax by yourself. Sip a cup of hot tea, read a book or listen to some soothing music.
- Embrace your emotions. If you have gone through divorce or lost a loved one, let yourself express your emotions openly. Don't force yourself to be happy just because it is a holiday.
- Seek professional help if you need it. **If you find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, or unable to face routine chores, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.**

Thanksgiving, after all, is a word of action. ~W.J. Cameron

AARC Survey

The American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC), with the support of patient support groups and home medical equipment providers, is conducting a survey about oxygen services that are being provided in the home. If you use oxygen in the home, please take a few minutes to take this survey at <http://www.yourlunghealth.org>.

In case you or someone you know does not have computer or Internet access, the survey can be downloaded from this site, printed, and mailed to the address on the form.

The results of the survey will be published on the AARC's web site when it is completed. Questions about the survey or the results can be directed to Nick Macmillan, RRT, FAARC at nick.macmillan@yahoo.com. Thanks for your help!

References:
Stress, Immunity and Susceptibility to Upper Respiratory Infection.
Sheldon Cohen & Gregory E. Miller

<http://www.lifescrpt.com>