



TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic - 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

Volume 18, Number 12

December 2013

APPRECIATING THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

As we enter the holiday season, we cannot help but be impressed by the abundance in our lives: our good fortune to live in this time, in this place, to have the support of our families and friends, and not to have worries about war, famine or natural disasters. Even though many of us may be deeply concerned about those less fortunate, both in our country and abroad, we can have some peace in our current circumstances. This is not to say that the holiday season is without its stresses. Nor does it mean that we turn away from those who are struggling. There may be special challenges at this time of the year, especially because of our abundances.

How do we appreciate our abundances without being stressed out by the demands of the season or caught up in creating more abundance? How do we let go of the expectation that we must have a “perfect” holiday season, that we must have “perfect” relationships with our families and friends during this time, or that we must re-create the same kind of holidays that we enjoyed in the past? Expectations, in and of themselves, only intensify the stress.

Because expectations create more problems during this season, one coping strategy is to review and modify one’s expectations. Plan ahead and decide what is important and what isn’t. Keep expectations balanced so that if plans must be changed, it does not cause a major disruption. Being flexible, accepting that

things do not have to be exactly as we want or hope, can help us to create a better balance. Moreover, don’t assure your own disappointment and sadness by comparing today with the “good old days” of your past.

It is perfectly normal, even necessary, to grieve when a loved one is no longer present, acknowledging those days are over. Mourning is natural when one is separated by distance or by estrangement. Making peace with these difficult situations can be healing. Finding different ways to experience the season without these significant people is an important way to cope.

Some people have found that establishing new traditions or breaking old ones can help them move beyond their grief. Trying something new, celebrating in new ways can create positive energy. It is essential not to isolate ourselves but instead to get out of our homes and find ways to join in with other people. There are many opportunities to appreciate music, look at holiday decorations, go window shopping (without buying) or volunteer to help others.

Finding enjoyment in other people instead of material things can be more satisfying and less costly. As Barton Goldsmith says in *Psychology Today*, (December 2011), “...it’s not about the presents, it’s about the presence.” To keep from getting caught up in the material side of the season, consider establishing a budget, making donations in honor of family or friends instead of giving gifts, and tracking expenses so that large bills do not arrive when the season is over. Stay in balance by avoiding an



overabundance of gifts *and* expenses. Likewise, avoid an overabundance of food and drink. Be aware that certain foods, such as those with high fat and sugar contents, can cause less energy and create their own stresses. Knowing that at the end of the season you have an extra 5 to 8 lbs to lose is very depressing! Exercise can help balance one's diet and one's mood, especially before and after large holiday meals. Just like planning seasonal activities so that we are not doing too much, planning how to handle parties and dinners can help prevent weight gain.

We can learn to say "no" to doing too much as well as to eating too much. It's the same principle. By watching our commitments and our diets, we are taking care of ourselves, making sure that we have the energy for the things and the people who are most important. Taking control of our calendars and our diets also has the effect of reducing stress.

Those people who already have an exceptionally stressful life are more vulnerable to the stresses of the season. For those, taking some "quiet time," doing something special for themselves, and eliminating unnecessary activities or chores can be liberating. A writer from Bermuda suggested "taking a walk on the beach," perhaps a mental walk in New England! Finding comfort in spiritual traditions and close family members or friends can help to re-focus stress on more positive sources of abundance.

Many things in our lives we cannot change. But we do have the ability to find inner sources of strength and decide where and how to put our energies to experience the outward abundances of the season. As expressed so well by

Thich Nkat Hahn:

*Drink your tea slowly and reverently,
as if it is the axis
on which the world earth revolves
...slowly, evenly, without
rushing toward the future;
Live the actual moment.
Only this moment is life.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HEARING AIDS

If you wear a hearing aid, check to see if it can be connected to the new, state-of-the-art sound system in the CWV auditorium. Your hearing aid needs a "t-coil" to connect to the CWV system. Your hearing aid may already have one and it just needs to be activated. Or maybe a "t-coil" can be added to your hearing aid. Contact your audiologist or the Clinic audiologist, Dr. Lou Femino to see if you can benefit from this wonderful, new technology.

AARP

Are you interested in participating in an AARP Driving Course? Another class can be scheduled in the spring if we have enough people. Look for a sign-up sheet, posted on Main Street, and indicate if you are interested.

*Best Wishes for a Peaceful Holiday Season and New Year!
From Barbara, Debbie, Judi, Andrea and Jenna*