

How to Have a Healthy Holiday Season

When I entered the exam room, I found Erin staring blankly out the window. She looked as if she was in another world. The note from my nurse said only “Post-holiday **depression**. Wants to talk.”

As I pulled out my stool and had a seat, I greeted her. “Good morning, Erin. What’s up?”

She continued to stare across the small lake behind our office as her lower chin began to quiver and a large tear streaked down her cheek. She reached down to the purse on her lap, pulled out a tissue and wiped her tear.

“It was the worst holiday season ever,” was all she could whisper.

As we talked, Erin revealed that she had eaten too much, gained too much **weight**, planned too many events, had too many things go wrong, had no time for herself or her dear husband, had limited time with her kids and no time for her Lord. In short, she had done too much that was unhealthful and too little that was healthy.

Unfortunately, too many women make the same mistake as Erin year after year after year. But perhaps you’re interested in breaking this cycle and having a holiday season for you and your family that is memorable, healthful and God-honoring. If so, then this prescription is for you.

Assessing Your Health

The first step is to understand how we are created. The Bible teaches that health is not just physical. In fact, the root word from which we derive our modern word *health* is also the

root for our words *whole* and *holy*.

Perhaps the best verse to illustrate this concept is found in the writing of the physician Luke in his description of Jesus as a preteen: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

In other words, Luke describes the highly **healthy** Jesus as healthy physically (stature), emotionally (wisdom), relationally (favor with men) and spiritually (favor with God). To be as highly healthy as God has designed each of us to be, these four "wheels of health" must be inflated and balanced. If one or more of them is flat, then it can impact and dramatically reduce our health. To be highly healthy requires assessing these four areas of health and then addressing any that are unhealthy.

In my book *God's Design for the Highly Healthy Person*, I discuss in great detail this hidden biblical secret to becoming highly healthy. And on my website is a "four-wheel" assessment tool that you can use to assess your health wheels. I hope you'll utilize one or both of these medically reliable and biblically sound health instruments (endorsed by the Christian Medical Association).

In the meantime, let me share with you the prescription I gave to Erin and continue to share with my patients and others. My prayer is that these principles and tips will help you and your family to have a highly healthy holiday season.

By the way, I saw Erin almost a year later. She brought her son in for a well-child checkup. As I entered the room, she was beaming from ear to ear.

"You sure seem happy," I commented.

"I am, Dr. Larimore. We had the best holiday season ever. It was wonderful!"

I remember smiling and being pleased that Erin had applied these simple principles for physical, emotional, relational and spiritual health during her family's holiday time. They will work for you and your family too.

Physical Health Tips

- **Exercise every day.** Plan your activity in advance, and don't leave it up to chance. Mark it on your calendar, and consider it as important as any other appointment.
- **Watch what you eat.** It's easy to overindulge during the holidays. Watch portion sizes, and select only one or two of your favorites foods.
- **Say no to excess calories, too many activities and overspending.** If you say yes only to what you really believe the Lord wants you to do, you'll experience more peace during the holidays and avoid feeling resentful and overwhelmed.
- **Place a priority on sleep.** Most adults and children require eight or nine hours of sleep per night in order to function optimally during the day.
- **Wind down for at least 30 minutes before you go to bed.** Don't watch TV. Instead pray, mediate, read, memorize Scripture or snuggle with and talk to your spouse. You'll fall asleep sooner and **sleep** more soundly.

Emotional Health Tips

- **Watch your time.** Strictly limit the number of holiday parties and social events you will attend.
- **Cut back on television, video game and Internet screen time.** Other than holiday specials, consider making your home TV-free as much as possible.
- **Keep a check on anxiety, stress, commitments, spending and striving for perfection.** Choose to ease the emotional load you carry.
- **Watch the budget.** If you spend money you don't have, you will be setting yourself up not only for a stress-filled

holiday season but also a debt-ridden new year. Decide how much money you can afford to spend on gifts, entertainment, food and other items, and then stick to your budget.

- **Plan ahead.** Develop a specific calendar for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other events. Plan menus and make one food-shopping trip to avoid a last-minute scramble for forgotten ingredients. Plan plenty of time for just you and your family.
- **Forget making resolutions!** Most people make resolutions that set themselves up for failure.

Relational Health Tips

- **Get support.** If you're alone for the holidays, take advantage of the social support of your church.
- **Help others.** Volunteer at community or church functions during the holidays. Helping others can be a great way to lift your spirits and make new acquaintances.
- **Create memories this holiday season.** Maybe rather than having family members buy gifts for one another, take that amount of money and go on a holiday trip as a family.
- **Seek counsel.** Relationship problems are often heightened during the holidays. If you cannot develop a strategy to reduce this holiday stress, talk to your pastor or a Christian counselor.
- **Be mindful.** Hold on to those family traditions that are healthy, but be willing to release those that are too stressful.

Spiritual Health Tips

- **Share your holiday traditions.** Invite others to talk with God (prayer) and listen to Him (Bible study, meditation and Scripture memorization).
- **Seek God.** Make time for your personal daily time with Christ.

- **Be in fellowship.** Make time to be with Christians and pre-Christians.
- **Cultivate a worshipful spirit.** Listen to sacred music and inspirational holiday music.
- **Honor God.** Make sure that your holiday traditions, decorations and practices honor Christ.
- **Involve the whole family.** Have family prayer and worship times.
- **Volunteer at a local shelter or soup kitchen.** “Adopt” a needy family or a “grandparent” at a local nursing home. Deliver gifts to a homeless shelter.
- **Be intentional about your intake of entertainment.** Watch spiritual videos, movies or plays.
- **Discuss with your children the meaning of the holiday and the lessons and values it represents.** May your family also experience joy and peace, memories and fellowship, worship and wonder during this most wonderful time of the year.

Walt Larimore, M.D., is one of America's most recognized family physicians. He is the best-selling author of several books, including God's Design for the Highly Healthy Person and SuperSized Kids. Larimore lives with his wife, Barb, in Colorado. Visit for more information on this subject and many other health-related topics.