

‘Tis The Season, for Stress!

By Frank Gemmato, L.Ac.

The Holidays are a time of increased stress for everyone. Not enough time to do all that needs doing. There are two types of stress: pre-holiday stress resulting from too much activity; and post holiday stress resulting from overindulgence.

In pre-holiday stress, shopping deadlines, office parties, dietary indiscretions, and inclement weather all do their part to tax the system and detract from the joy of the season. What can be done? After all, what is the point of being with loved ones and possessing material things if you can't enjoy them? The challenge is to be fully present in order to appreciate the people and gifts in our lives.

The Season comes at the darkest time of the year (the winter solstice) culminating in days of feasting (Christmas or Hanukkah) and New Year's Day. In the aftermath, many pay the price of excessive food, drink, and partying and are left with toxic symptoms such as *headaches, tiredness*, and other signs. Others suffer from depression due to unfulfilled expectations or the relative lack of light (seasonally affected disorder).

Here is how Chinese medicine views stress. *Qi*, or the body's vital energy, becomes stagnated through over activity or overindulgence, and can actually begin to implode as it "invades" the stomach, causing digestive problems such as *indigestion, gas, or bloating*. Or there can just be *irritability* with short temper. Muscle tension or soreness with *neck or back pain* can also accompany these symptoms. Whether the stress is internally or externally generated, it is usually treated in terms of the Liver in Chinese medicine. Acupuncture and herbs can be used to release the tension and stress where they originate and manifest: in the Liver, Stomach, or in the Meridians (the pathways of vital energy).

In his book Fire in the Belly, Sam Keen suggests that stress is not simply a disease; "it is a symptom that you are *living somebody else's life*, marching to a drumbeat that doesn't syncopate with your personal body rhythms, playing a role you didn't create, living a script written by a different authority." Is stress simply behaving inconsistent with one's values?

I always encourage my clients, loved ones and myself to be good to ourselves during the holidays, to be detached from things, reduce expectations, and enjoy the gifts in our lives. May yours be a time of peace, health and prosperity!