

Keeping Christmas Merry!

By Shelly Teske and the NABIS Women's Support Group

Christmas Stressors

Life hands us daily challenges. Some of those challenges take more energy and have a greater affect on our emotions than others. Brain injury comes suddenly and definitely tests our well-being in physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual ways. When affected by brain injury, achieving a healthy balance can be difficult... then along comes Christmas! It is a time of year to be filled with celebration; gatherings of family, friends, and community networks; entertainment; and spiritual reflection. However, it can easily become frustrating, and sometimes guilt provoking, when we become worn out by the duties and expectations that are put upon us by ourselves or others.

This idea was brought to our attention in one of our Women's Group support sessions. We noticed overwhelming feelings coming upon us with Christmas on its way, adding to the many other daily duties to attend to. We welcomed the opportunity to reflect

about how we can manage our stress and tension, and make the most of the Christmas season.

Stress comes from negative events, like car accidents or illnesses, as well as positive events, like weddings, an exciting move to a new home, as well as times of celebration, such as Christmas.

Stress can be helpful; it motivates us to do our best and work toward goals. Stress should also fluctuate. It will be at higher levels for a certain period of time, then it should decrease so that our minds and bodies can recuperate and prepare for the next challenge. If stress is ongoing, or if there is a pile up of events that cause stress, our system gets overloaded, and we notice ourselves unable to manage the stress effectively. This is called burnout.

Burnout occurs when we are no longer able to take on the daily tasks and challenges that come our way. There are noticeable physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral difficulties we begin to experience. Memory problems become worse, we find it hard to concentrate, we worry excessively. Our temper rises, we become irritable, depression can set in, and we

feel overwhelmed. We get sick with headaches, backaches, sore muscles, frequent colds, and we start sleeping too much or far too little. We might find ourselves getting in arguments, using alcohol or cigarettes to "calm our nerves", isolating ourselves, and procrastinating. After talking about this, we realize that burnout is far more common than we thought. All these things can add up to a really miserable Christmas!

The good news is that there are small, simple steps that we can draw from to help!

How to Have

A MERRY Christmas:

So, how do we help ourselves and others to enjoy the Christmas season and not allow it to "tip the scales" for us? Here's what the Women's Group decided to do:

1. **Discuss and come to an agreement** with family regarding gift-giving procedures. Families may decide to shop for a little something for everyone. How much of extended family and friends are included in that list? Drawing names is another alternative. One member's family buys something for each of the kids and then adults draw names in order to help save time and money. Maybe people agree to buy something under twenty dollars; that can really bring out creative gift ideas!
2. **Keep discussions productive.** Christmas planning discussions that come up within families can be challenging. Everyone has an opinion, and not everyone's ideas are always heard or considered. Some helpful tips in family discussions were:
 - ✓ Keep level-headed.
 - ✓ Listen! Give everyone a voice. Don't leave people out of the conversation or decision-making, and don't assume that people not speaking don't have a preference. Also, remember that each person's opinions are equally important!
 - ✓ Be open-minded and rational.
 - ✓ Speak up! We won't be heard if we don't offer our voice.
 - ✓ Phrase ideas and opinions in a non-threatening manner that contributes to problem solving rather than conflict. Then

