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Katy Carter, MA Executive Director-AVCS**

## **Say Hello To The Holidays!**

**It's that time of year again,** that feverish excitement of celebrations, marketing madness, parties and family togetherness that begins right after Halloween, builds to Thanksgiving, and continues, gaining momentum, through New Year's Eve. While this season is meant to bring feelings of love and cheer, for many people this exciting season is mixed with stress and loneliness. **But What Causes Holiday Stress?**

The Holiday Season often seems "bigger than life". But can we have **too much of a good thing?** This time of year often prompts us to try to do too much. We make too many plans, afraid to say no and miss out on any part of the festivities. This can culminate in too much holiday stress and leave us feeling more "bah humbug", rather than "ho, ho, ho". We often find ourselves **eating, drinking and spending too much.** An overabundance of parties and gift-giving occasions lead many people to eat, drink, and be merry -- often to excess. Moderation is the key to enjoying the best the season has to offer without wallowing in regret later. Remember at this time of year, **it's all relative.** The holidays are a time when extended families tend to gather. While this can be a wonderful thing, even the most close-knit families can overdose on togetherness time. Many families also have 'roles' that each member falls into that have more to do with who individuals used to be rather than who they are today. Many a grown adult has found themselves suddenly returning to twelve year old status after getting together with the family that remembers them when. What if this time of year brings us thoughts of **friend or foe?** For those who don't have these family issues, but who rely more on friends for this kind of support the rest of the year, loneliness or feeling left out can be an even bigger problem. **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD),** is an often unrecognized problem that comes with the holiday season is actually a by-product of the seasons changing from fall to winter. As daylight diminishes and the weather causes many of us to spend more time indoors, many people are affected to some degree by a type of depression known as seasonal affective disorder. It's a subtle, but very real condition that can cast a shadow over the whole season and be a source of stress and unhappiness during a time that people expect to feel just the opposite.

**So how do we Minimize Holiday Stress?** One thing we can count on about holiday stress is that it's predictable. Unlike many other types of negative stress we encounter in life, we know when holiday stress will begin and end, and we can make plans to reduce the amount of stress we experience and the negative impact it has on us. Here are some tips you can try to help reduce holiday stress before it begins so that it remains at a positive level, rather than the alternative.

**Remember, move it or lose it!** Exercise is one of the best remedies for stress. If you can get your workout outside, all the better to soak up some sun while stretching your anxieties away. Yoga is a wonderful form of exercise to increase endorphins, practice mindfulness and improve overall flexibility. So before you lose your mind, take a brisk walk around the block or in the mall to get things back in perspective.

**Learn how to eat, drink & be merry- the right way.** Breaking bread with friends and family as well as enjoying the bountiful culinary delights that holidays bring are a big part of the traditions of the season. However, too much sugar or one too many types of eggnog can cause us to come crashing down the next day. Overeating or relying heavily on alcohol is often followed by regret and depression. Using moderation in food and drink choices will leave you feeling more in control- often a missing element around the holidays- and better about your self. In addition, there are at least 5 positive food choices that will actually reduce overall stress feelings and symptoms. They are: **Spinach** has good amounts of

magnesium which helps to lower your blood pressure, leaving you calmer. So load up on spinach dip, spinach quiche and spinach omelets to feel more relaxed. **Oranges, tangerines and Clementine** all have wonderful concentrations of antioxidants to boost your immunity system keeping you healthy and strong. **Dark Chocolate** (or any kind of chocolate for that matter) facilitates production of serotonin, a chemical in the brain that helps keep you calm, relaxed and distressed. **Oatmeal**, believe it or not, helps the brain produce serotonin as well with the added bonus that it digests very slowly in the body so it can last all day. Oatmeal Cookies with Raisins are chock full of B Vitamins to keep your energy level up and your mood light. **Fish** such as Tuna-Ahi or Salmon provide large amounts of Omega 3 fatty acids. Omega 3s help the body stop the surge of stress hormones. Three servings a week will keep you on track for the entire season.

**Set your priorities** Before you get overwhelmed by too many activities, it's important to decide what traditions offer the most positive impact and eliminate extra activities. **Make a plan.** Don't get too ambitious or you will lose site of the important moments. Maybe it's time to **lower your expectations.** Holidays rarely become the perfect stories we hear about, read about and all aspire to. Gifts are ugly, toys break, people misbehave. So take a deep breath, relax and enjoy the good times and laugh at the bad. The holidays only happen once a year. Enjoy the ride instead of fighting the whole time to get off the rollercoaster.

It's time to **simplify the season.** Take a moment to appreciate the simple things. Cutting corners or toning down elaborate plans can put the emphasis back on the really special, cherished parts of the holiday that you truly enjoy. To the rest, learn to say NO.

**This year make a plan to conquer the stress of the Holiday Season before it conquers you!** You are not alone in the feelings of anxiety or depression that this season can bring but you don't have to throw in your hat and call it a day either. With a little thoughtful planning and attention to choices, you will be able to make subtle changes that not only will help you survive the holidays but might also help you to enjoy them. Cheers!