

## Dr. Laurie Nadel

**The holidays are supposed to be a festive, fun time of year. Why do they seem so stressful?**

Christmas and Hanukkah and Kwanzaa — for many people it feels like they are ambushed. There are a lot of obligations around the holidays. It's a deadline. Cards have to be sent. Presents have to be ready by a particular date. We are bombarded with messages that tell us we have to buy stuff and purchase all these things for our loved ones. Add that to the relentless multi-tasking that we have to do everyday. Very often the pressure to make everything perfect — the decorations, the food — adds another layer of stress. Sometimes, so does having to spend time with people you don't see for the rest of the year, or maybe people you don't even particularly like.

**Do you see a spike in patients this time of year?**

For many people it's a very painful time. They feel very much alone. They may feel disappointed in themselves if they don't feel happy and upbeat around the holidays.

**The holidays used to seem so magical. What happened?**

If you ask many people what their childhood holidays were like, they say they were simpler. They had more to do with family getting together than with buying a plasma TV or a Lexus with a bow on top, the latest Ipod or computer for our kids, or an upgrade of whatever it is we already have. Now at Christmas, we expect to get these things as a sign of love, and we are also expected to give at this level. There is much more financial pressure.



Dreading the holidays? Anguishing over just the right gift? Wish you could hibernate until the festivities are over? If the holidays seem stressful and long-standing traditions feel more toxic than joyful, you're not alone, says Laurie Nadel, PhD, a psychologist and anti-stress coach who practices in Long Beach and Manhattan. Give yourself a break. Relax. The Christmas ornaments or the Hanukkah lights don't have to be perfect to have merry holiday celebrations.

Dr. Nadel — Dr. Laurie to her patients — is to stress what Dr. Phil McGraw is to relationships. With her soft-spoken manner and sensible advice, she helps individuals let go of their anxieties and feel calm and reassured in times of crisis. An author and journalist with CBS News, Dr. Nadel transitioned into a career as a psychologist and anti-stress coach in 1991 after writing *Sixth Sense*, an international bestseller about hunches and gut feelings. "The book included interviews with Nobel Prize-winning scientists who encouraged me to continue my research in this field," says Dr. Nadel, who went on to earn a PhD in psychology and a second doctorate in clinical hypnotherapy. An updated edition of *Sixth Sense: Unlocking Your Ultimate Mind Power* (ASJA Press/Universe.com), released in November 2006, contains exercises to hone your own sixth sense.

After September 11, 2001, Dr. Nadel counseled hundreds of eyewitnesses to the terrorist attacks who were suffering from flashbacks. At South Nassau Communities Hospital's WTC Family Center in Rockville Centre, she directed an innovative program for teenagers and young adults who lost a parent in the attacks on the World Trade Center. Dr. Nadel has also helped children and teens handle stress and grief. She counsels single parents, women going through divorce and individuals struggling with stress-related health issues, phobias, sleep problems and flashbacks due to trauma.

## DE-STRESSING THE HOLIDAYS

by Marcelle S. Fischler


**What can you do to take the stress out of preparing for the holidays?**

Prepare for the pressure of getting ready for the holidays by taking a few minutes a day to do something restful and relaxing for yourself. Close your eyes and listen to music that you like. Take a relaxing bath. Light a candle and read something inspirational or constructive. Learn to train your thoughts so that you are consciously giving yourself permission to feel relaxed instead of pressured.

**What tips can you suggest to make the holidays more enjoyable?**

Make a list of the things that you like about the holidays and the traditions you want to keep. Maybe every year you have lunch with a few friends that you don't see the rest of the year. Or you have a long talk with a friend who lives far away. Do something that creates a tradition of an activity that is separate from a gift-giving experience. Make it a time that every year you and your family go to the country and get a freshly-cut tree or look at the decorations in Manhattan and take a hansom cab ride around Central Park. Try to eliminate more of the things you don't want to do.

**How can you feel more aligned with the spirit of the season?**

You can make charitable donations that make you feel good. Spend time with a niece or a nephew or a grandparent. Focus on the warm connections that you have as part of your holiday season. 

*Author and award-winning journalist Marcelle S. Fischler has written extensively about Long Island for the past nine years.*