The holidays are only how many days away? YIKES! I have so much to do before they get here. How am I going to get it all done? Where do I start? Are these same thoughts racing through your mind? Is your blood sugar and blood pressure rising? Why is this happening?

**STRESS**

Stress occurs when we think a situation is threatening or challenging. When stress occurs, our body prepares to take action. This is called the **fight-or-flight response**. The release of stress hormones raises the blood sugar level to provide the brain and muscle cells with energy to deal with the situation. Unfortunately, in people who have diabetes, insulin is not always available to keep the blood sugar in normal range. Excessive or ongoing stress, like the holiday season, can be a barrier to good blood glucose control.

Learning to deal with stress is part of living a healthier life. To deal with stress successfully, use coping skills and be flexible with challenging situations. This can make the holiday season much more enjoyable.

**Here are some tips to decrease and deal with your holiday stress:**

**Organize and Prioritize:**
- Start early in planning what needs to be accomplished.
- Try to simplify.
- Focus on spending time with people and less on the hype around gifts and food.
- Develop a list of tasks. Prioritize them according to importance. Eliminate tasks that are not of high importance.
- Develop a realistic timeline for the completion of tasks.
  - Break tasks down and determine what can be done ahead of time versus what needs to be done last minute.
  - Decide if any of the tasks can be accomplished by someone else.

**Take care of your diabetes:** **Don’t sacrifice good blood glucose control during this time.**
- Develop a plan for getting physical activity. Regular exercise during the holidays can help you regulate your blood sugars.
  - Walk an extra lap around the mall before shopping.
  - Consider walking around the neighborhood to see the holiday lights.
- Continue to aim for good nutrition during this busy time.
- Eating healthy and sticking to your meal plan will help you to keep your immune system strong.
  - Planning for diabetes-friendly meals in advance will help so you are less likely to grab high-fat, high carbohydrate convenience foods.
The American Diabetes Association has a list of recipes to access using MyFoodAdvisor:

- Make extra portions of healthier foods early in the season; freeze them to use when your schedule gets really busy.
- Prepare for possible changes in plans/ routine. Carry carbohydrate snacks, a fast acting carbohydrate source for low sugars, your blood glucose meter, and your diabetes medication with you.

Take time to relax: There are many ways to relax, here are a few:
- Deep breathing: Slowly take in a deep breath, and then slowly release the air while relaxing your muscles. Continue deep breathing and relaxing for 5-20 minutes. Try to practice this daily to become skilled at it. Deep breathing can be done wherever you are, takes no equipment and takes only a few minutes.
- Visual Imagery: Close your eyes and picture a place where you feel relaxed. Think about what you are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and possibly tasting. Fill your mind with all of these pleasant thoughts.
- Progressive relaxation therapy: Using a CD, you alternately tense muscles and relax them.
- Other options may include: yoga, exercise, taking a bath, napping, listening to some calming music (maybe holiday music), hobbies and humor.

If you use some of these tips, you should be able to keep the Fa la la la la in your holidays.

Here’s a dip recipe that can be made in advance, refrigerated and heated just prior to serving to help decrease your last minute preparation and stress:

**Spinach-Roasted Red Pepper Dip**
Serving Size: 1 Tablespoon, Servings per Recipe: 36

½ cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese  
½ cup plain low-fat or fat-free yogurt  
½ cup light mayonnaise dressing or salad dressing  
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese  
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon Dijon-style mustard  
1 cup loosely packed fresh spinach leaves, coarsely chopped  
¾ cup bottled roasted red sweet peppers, drained and chopped  
¼ cup thinly sliced green onions  
3 red and/or yellow sweet peppers, seeded and cut into strips, or desired dippers

1. In a large bowl, stir together mozzarella cheese, yogurt, mayonnaise dressing, 2 tablespoons of the Parmesan cheese, flour and the Dijon mustard.
2. Stir in the spinach, roasted red peppers, and 2 tablespoons of the green onions. Spread the cheese vegetable mixture evenly into a 1-quart ovenproof shallow dish or a 9-inch pie plate. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese. (If preparing in advance, cover dish and refrigerate overnight. Remove from refrigerator while oven is preheating.)

3. Bake the dip, uncovered, in a 350 degree F oven for 15-20 minutes or until the edges are bubbly and the mixture is heated through. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons green onions. Serve with red and/or yellow sweet pepper strips. Makes 2 ¼ cups.

Nutrition Facts per Serving: Calories: 21, Total Fat: 2 g (0 g sat. fat), Cholesterol: 3 mg, Sodium: 47 mg, Carbohydrates: 1 g, Fiber: 0 g, Protein: 1 g.

Happy Holidays from your ThedaCare Diabetes Education Staff!