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The holidays are a time for family, fun and festivities. So why are you so stressed?

Actually, stress is associated with positive life events as much as negative ones. It’s normal to feel overwhelmed when planning family meals, shopping for gifts, decorating the house or figuring out what to do with the kids during their holiday break.

“Stress causes an unhealthy ‘high alert!’ response that wears down the body,” says Ashley Davis Bush, author of the book “Shortcuts to Inner Peace: 70 Simple Paths to Everyday Serenity.” “Through intentionally summoning a feeling of inner calm, we literally change the chemistry of our bodies.”

If you’re looking to keep a calm head in the midst of visiting relatives and busy shopping malls, try some of Bush’s favorite shortcuts this holiday season:

• Play It Again, Sam: When you find yourself grumbling over a nagging task (hanging lights, preparing the guest room), play or sing a specific song. It doesn't have to be holiday-related; any upbeat tune will help!

• Remember This: When waiting in line to purchase gifts or groceries, ask yourself "What do I need to remember?" Keep asking yourself this question until you start to get substantial answers like "I need to remember what really matters in life."

• Stop 'N' Smell: Before you being cooking a holiday meal, take time to smell your ingredients. Or pull a fragrant item from your pantry that triggers positive emotions (e.g. coffee, vanilla extract, rosemary). Close your eyes and inhale. The smell should ground you in the present, allowing you to savor your time in the kitchen.

• My Sunshine: Family dynamics are complicated and can get strained during the holidays. If you find yourself getting annoyed with a loved one, consider humming the song "You Are My Sunshine" and remember that your time together is limited. If your buttons really get pushed, excuse yourself and throw cool water on your face or place a wet towel on your neck. Cool relief to the body brings relief to the mind as well.

• Touch Tank: It's easy in the hustle and bustle of the holidays to forget to appreciate all the beautiful decorations, not to mention the beauty of the season. Consider keeping a small box or basket of seasonal treasures -- pine cones, smooth stones, mistletoe and chestnuts. Whenever you feel tense or overwhelmed, take a few moments to finger each object. Simple appreciation tends to restore inner calm.

"We often think we need to change our circumstances to feel peaceful or that we need to be immersed in spa-like surroundings to find tranquility," says Bush. "But inner peace requires no extra time or money -- just a shift in attention."

You can find more ways to cope with stress at www.ashleydavisbush.com.

Let peace on earth begin with you this holiday season.