

Why women should lower their holiday stress level

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Too much pressure can lead to heart damage, cardiologist says.

(HealthDay)— The stress of making holiday time a happy time can put women at risk for heart problems, an expert warns.

The pressure of tasks like cooking, buying presents, and organizing family gatherings can lead to stress that can damage their hearts, according to Dr. Karla Kurrelmeyer, a cardiologist with Houston Methodist Hospital's Heart and Vascular Center.

"We have seen more than a few cases of stress-induced cardiomyopathy around the holidays. This occurs when women are under great amounts of stress for a short period of time and that stress is compounded with another traumatic event, such as a death in the family, a car accident, loss of money, etc. If it is ignored, it can be fatal," she said in a hospital news release.

Stress-induced cardiomyopathy occurs when stress hormones weaken the [left ventricle](#), the heart's main pumping chamber. The condition is most common among women in their late 50s to mid-70s.

"Someone experiencing this condition might develop chest pains or shortness of breath after severe stress, either emotional or physical,"

Kurrelmeyer said. "In most cases, it is treated with medication such as beta blockers or ACE inhibitors. It's important to have an echocardiogram as soon as possible if you are experiencing any symptoms."

During the holidays, many [women](#) have a spike in blood pressure, which puts them at increased risk for chest pains, heart palpitations or even stroke. Women with a history of [high blood pressure](#) require close monitoring when under stress.

"It's important to take time for yourself during the holiday season and do things that will help relieve your [stress](#)," Kurrelmeyer said.

"Exercise, either walking or running, yoga, meditation, a nice walk with a loved one, whatever it takes, make it happen. The holidays should be a joyous time spent with family and friends at home, not with doctors in an emergency room," she concluded.

More information: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has more about [women and heart health](#).

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