



## *Happy Holidays from Helen Adrienne*

Dear Helen,

I have been aware since 1979 when I first started working with infertility patients, that this season can be a particularly painful time. Under the best of circumstances, the diagnosis and treatment of infertility sends most normal people on an emotional trip into the ionosphere. And the holidays often fling people into another solar system altogether.

This Baby Manifest-O newsletter is devoted to two articles which are designed to provide perspective and choice. "A Grab Bag of Coping Skills for the Holidays" is meant to present a map from which you can pinpoint an approach to coping which might not have occurred to you. "Uniting as a Couple to Beat Holiday Stress" is meant to shore up your sense of entitlement to taking care of your needs, despite the expectations of your families of origin. (These principles pertain to those seeking to be single mothers by choice as well.)

A year or so ago someone called me in a panic in anticipation of the forced gaiety that was expected of her during the upcoming holiday festivities. I invited her to sit in front of a clock or watch with a second hand and allow herself to breathe deeply and slowly for 60 seconds. I would remain quiet on my end of the phone. When the minute was up, she expressed shock at how much better she felt. She had stopped shaking and felt able to reconnect with her inner strength and resources. Under duress, it is easy to forget that we have a built-in tranquilizer - our breath.

You need not bubble like holiday champagne when you feel as flat as day-old club soda. But you can feel buoyed by your ability to gather new ideas for coping. I wish all of you the fortitude to honor your feelings and recognize that you have the power to shift from feeling overwhelmed to feeling empowered. Start by taking a breather. Then, read these articles for ideas.

Happy holidays!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Helen Adrienne'.



### Holiday Gratitude

Many thanks to Dr. Jamie Grifo, program director at the NYU Fertility Center, for giving me the opportunity to share the importance of mind/body interventions with his faculty and staff. Infertility is a total mind/body experience and the best adjunct solutions to

top-notch medical care are mind/body interventions.

## **A Grab Bag of Coping Skills for the Holidays**

The need to cope with adversity is unavoidable. Sometimes we have the presence of mind to step back from a problem and find a solution that relieves our stress. Other times the problem may swamp us because it is bigger than the coping mechanisms which are in our repertoire.

We all get tossed around in life and we all form defenses which are molded by our environment. Although these defenses may make sense in one environment, they can limit our ability to cope in another. Sooner or later, we are all likely to find ourselves in challenging circumstances where we are at risk for getting stuck in learned patterns which have outlived their usefulness. Infertility is such a big challenge that virtually everyone gets stuck. The agony and demands of infertility usually mandate that we develop new responses, new ways to cope.

Coping means dealing with and overcoming problems. Two related and interesting definitions of "coping" suggest the kind of adaptation that we need in order to cope effectively. Coping, in one definition, describes the round-edged tile that is used to give a bathroom or kitchen wall or a swimming pool a finished look. In the other, coping refers to the strips of fabric that go in-between the sections of a quilt which help to make up for imperfections. Infertility leaves us feeling unfinished and suggests that there is something more that is needed to recreate a sense of wholeness. We need to be able to ease the tattered edge of the mental and physical disruption caused by this unwanted reality.

The following\* is a compilation of the various coping strategies from which you can choose. They can guide you to reestablish equilibrium at this difficult time. Which of these strategies resonate for you? Whichever make sense to you are more likely to be useable if you can discipline yourself to:

1. Stop when you feel overwrought.
2. Take a breather.
3. Refer to this list so as to decide what would work better for you than whatever you have been doing.

### **COGNITIVE APPROACHES**

Change any of the following:

- Communication style
- Environment
- Schedule
- Responsibility
- Family or work routine
- Procedure
- Life-style habits

Do any of the following:

- Make a pro/con list
- Clarify values
- Evaluate relationships
- Notice stressors at home, at work, socially
- Evaluate your needs
- Ask yourself what would rebuild your self-esteem
- Set goals
- Exercise, yoga, tai chi to feel physical strength and relax the body

### **EMOTIONAL APPROACHES** **THINGS TO DO**

- Exercise, yoga, tai chi to release endorphins and relax the mind
- Learn relaxation techniques
- Distract yourself with something which is predictably pleasant
- Monitor and shift thoughts to avoid being trapped in negativity
- Reframe situation in a better light (how is the glass half-full?)
- Allow a catharsis
- Reach out for social support
- Find a way to laugh
- Release emotions into a journal
- Recognize and release judgment

### **EMOTIONAL APPROACHES** **WAYS TO BE**

- Create affirmations, positive self-talk; repeat these mantras in your mind
- Experience your spirituality
- Accept the reality
- Flow with guided imagery or hypnosis tapes
- Learn self-hypnosis
- Focus mindfully in and on the present moment
- Breathe purposefully and generously
- Enjoy music, dance, singing, chanting, drumming
- Become absorbed in art projects
- Play
- Read or listen to stories
- Participate in energy healing such as Reiki
- Release tension with a massage

This list represents the many ways we can break into the stress cycle. The relentless physical and mental stress of infertility universally leaves people feeling out of control. This list is designed to organize your options, giving you a fighting chance to feel mastery over these unwanted circumstances - one day at a time.

These options may serve you well. But perhaps they only get you into first gear. Infertility is notorious for creating a need to think clearly at the same time that it

scrambles your brain. You may need to enlist the support of a trusted friend or therapist if you find it difficult to cope in new ways.

*\*The organization of this list is adapted from The Wellness Book by Herbert Benson, MD and Eileen Stuart, RN.*

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## Uniting as a Couple to Deal With the Holiday Stress

Infertility is demanding and stressful. The holidays are demanding and stressful. Put them together and one plus one equals much more than two. At the same time, the holidays provide two opportunities to turn the marital relationship into a refuge, despite the sound of jingle bells.

In the best of families, tensions abound at holiday time. The milieu for get-togethers may have to do with who expects what, who can't stand whom, whose house is center stage, whose traditions "win", who's impossible to buy presents for and who's jealous of what. And of course, a separate and very big fly in the ointment is who will be there with babies.

This does not mean that all families are looney toons. It does mean, however, that even in the steadiest of families, things cannot ever be perfect - and - you are not likely to be in the mood for anyone's imperfections.

Then add a complication: If people know what you are going through, they may not know what to say and, though well-meaning, may say the wrong thing. But what if no one in your family knows what you are dealing with? While keeping the secret may be the lesser of two evils, it still creates additional stress for you.

**Creating a united front is one way to create a refuge.** You may be in total agreement about what you need, and your families may have the flexibility to respect it. But what if the needs of you and your spouse are not congruent? What if one or both of you are afraid to violate tradition?

The Chinese character for crisis is a combination of the characters for danger and opportunity. It may feel dangerous to set a limit to one or both families who want their traditions perpetuated. Anticipating feelings of guilt for violating tradition can feel as bad as complying with expectations from which you want to escape. Yet, you are entitled to feeling entitled to claiming what you need, especially under these circumstances.

This is an important opportunity for you to define your "coupleness." As married adults, it is your job, and it is your right to let both families know what boundaries you need in place for your well-being. It is highly recommended that if you cannot come to terms together with the gravitational force of the point of view of your respective families, that you seek the guidance of a therapist in order to gain clarity and resolution. The last thing that you need is to feel divided and conquered.

Whether on your own or with professional help, if you successfully decide and declare what your decisions about the holidays are, you set yourselves up to minimize the impact of family/holiday stress on your minds and bodies at a time when mind/body equanimity is so important.

**Learning to reverse the physiology of stress is the second opportunity to create a refuge.** It is no longer in dispute that both the mental and physical experiences of stress land in the body. That would be counterproductive.

Furthermore, in this society, many of us live in a state of red alert, tolerating high levels of stress as a matter of routine. While there are many who need to learn how to manage stress as much as you do, few need to learn how more than you.

Uniting as a couple with the intention to explore techniques of mind/body relaxation that you can enjoy together is a valuable way to spend some time. Reducing mind/body stress clears a space to experience your love and compassion for each other in a fuller way. Feeling loved and understood is palliative and reduces the stress even more.

As hectic as the holiday time can be, you can mindfully work together to identify the approaches which would most take the edge off of this frenzied time. It does not matter whether you achieve relief from mind/body stress by going in through the body "door" with a yoga or tai chi class for couples, for instance, or through the mind "door" with a guided imagery tape or any other meditative experience that you can do together. By relaxing the body, you can break the mental grip - and vice versa. (Refer to the Grab Bag article above for more ideas.)

Infertility is nasty. But the silver lining in the cloud is that as a couple, you can and should put your needs front and center. It may seem necessary to insulate yourselves from family events. And creating your own sanctuary in which you can practice techniques which reverse the physiology of stress helps to keep your love for one another front and center and can soften the arduous journey toward your goal.

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### **Special Giveaway**

I'm interested in featuring "real people" stories about experiences with infertility.

The first twenty respondents will be receiving a free copy of my Breathing in the Now CD.

Any stories chosen as a write-up in future newsletters will receive a free counseling session in addition to the free CD.

Requirements:

Write up an aspect of your experience that could be part of a featured article in an upcoming newsletter - it should be uplifting and inspirational. It should also be about 600 words.

Send your story to:

Helen Adrienne

[helen@helenadrienne.com](mailto:helen@helenadrienne.com)

(please send in the body of your message - not as an attachment)

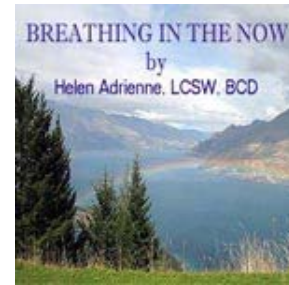
Don't forget about the **December 14th** Day-Long Mind/Body Support Group for Infertility - A Pre-Holiday Oasis

[Click here for more details.](#)

Great for a stocking stuffer or to give as a present!

This audio CD was developed and narrated by Helen Adrienne, LCSW, BCD. If you are stressed by the impact of the life-altering diagnosis of infertility or any unwanted, protracted challenge, "Breathing in the Now" is an audioguide to mindfully releasing the physiology of stress and returning your body/mind to neutral.

**Our Price:** \$18.95



*Keep in mind that I offer a 20-minute free consult which could jump-start your way to coping anew - think of this as a gift you give yourself. Please email me if you would like to set up a time. You might also be interested in ordering my CD, Breathing in the Now, which teaches an effective relaxation technique. Click here to learn more.*

*I welcome feedback from my readers.*

*Sincerely,*

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