



News Release

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VIDEO ALERT: Video resources, including an interview with Dr. Barrett talking about holiday heart attack and stroke issues, can be found on the [Mayo Clinic News Network](#).

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Mayo Clinic Neurologist Offers Tips for Avoiding Holiday Heart Attacks and Stroke

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — The holidays are certainly an exciting time, filled hopefully with love, laughter, food and gifts, but the hustle and bustle can also bring unexpected medical concerns, including increased risk for heart attack and stroke. Several studies have shown that the incidence of [heart attack](#) and [stroke](#) increase in December and January, particularly on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. To minimize the risk of an unexpected visit to the emergency room, [Kevin M. Barrett, M.D.](#), vascular neurologist at [Mayo Clinic in Florida](#) and co-director of the Mayo Clinic Primary Stroke Center, offers these tips:

1. Reduce stress. "Many people believe the holidays can actually change the physiology of the body and increase levels of stress hormones," says Dr. Barrett. "The increased hormones can lead to [increases in blood pressure](#) and subsequently translate into heart attack and stroke."
2. Eat and drink in moderation. The holidays can lead to overindulgences with food and alcohol but try to be mindful. Alcohol specifically can irritate the heart muscle and cause [atrial fibrillation](#) — or abnormal heart rhythm — that increases stroke risk.
3. Be vigilant with medication. Varying schedules, additional activities and travel can lead to lapses in the way you take medication during the holidays. "Be mindful of taking your medications, especially if you are on blood pressure pills or blood thinners," says Dr. Barrett. And don't forget to label medication bottles and carry them with you if traveling by air.
4. Exercise — and get rest. Try to maintain movement and heart-healthy activities but take appropriate breaks.

5. Know the symptoms for [heart attack](#) and [stroke](#), and don't delay in seeking medical attention. Call 911 if there is a concern. "There are many effective treatments available for heart attack and stroke," says Dr. Barrett, "but it's imperative a person come to the hospital promptly so health care professionals can treat them in the most efficient and effective way."

Taking time to be mindful of stress and the triggers of heart attack and stroke can hopefully help safeguard an enjoyable and pleasant holiday season.

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