

## **Festive fever**

### **For working women with families, donning Santa's hat overloads their plate**

By JOANNE RICHARD, Toronto Sun

'Tis the season for giving and giving and giving some more. The festive season leaves no time to be jolly for many women who are already wearing too many hats and have to don one more -- Santa's.

Incessant holiday demands leave many women feeling ho-ho-hopeless as to-do lists rival Christmas wish lists and women whose plates are already overloaded year round, end up in perpetual overdrive.

The "over-givers" trend is alive and not well, says Heidi Cowie, a Hamilton counsellor.

The pressures are overwhelming: Forty-five percent of Canadian women frequently feel stressed by work, family responsibilities and/or family finances and 52% feel they don't have enough time for family, friends or partners, and/or things they would like to do, reveals a Heart and Stroke Foundation study.

These are the statistics of a new generation of increasing expectations and multiple roles -- which multiply at Christmas. "Over-givers are mostly women trying to please their children, their spouse, their bosses, and maybe even their aging parents." says Cowie.

Nellie Noack knows: She is the classic over-giver -- or was. Noack, 39, just went back to work after a fourmonth stress leave from her job as sales manager for Avon. She not only manages 380 reps, but mothers three teens, ages 16, 15 and 13. This year, "I just bottomed out," says Noack. Despair and disillusionment set in and "I stopped caring about everything." She spent the first six weeks in bed, sleeping and reading; "I never left the house."

Eventually, through counselling, she acquired skills to do less and not feel guilty about it.

Noack has revamped the holiday season too: "We're either going on a holiday or we're totally low-keying Christmas and keeping it simple."

#### **'Second or third job'**

According to [Marilyn Barnicke Belleghem](#), "Many women take on too much responsibility for making the holiday celebrations perfect. They do this on top of their other responsibilities so holiday preparation can become a second or even a third job.

"The media portrays festivities with elaborate cooking, decorating and socializing and it all looks like so much elegance and fun that many women feel pressured to create something special," adds the registered marriage and family therapist and author of *Questing Marilyn: In Search of My Holy Grail, Personal Growth Through Travel*.

According to Cowie, the increased demands and expectations of the holiday season demand higher stamina and energy. "We may feel forced to function at a higher level, which snowballs into higher self-imposed expectations.