

Handling Holiday Stress

Make this season a bright and bountiful one by giving yourself the best present of all: peace of mind. Turn the holidays into a happy, stress-free time by taking care of yourself, bringing balance to your work and home life and not letting holiday worries overwhelm you.

Tips for Coping with Holiday Stress

- **Do not be perfect; be you.** One of the quickest ways to holiday burnout is to set high, unrealistic expectations for yourself. Make your plans simple and your activities doable.
- **Create your wish list early.** Ask yourself what you want to accomplish this holiday season. Do you want to get your shopping done early? Would you like to host your relatives? Write down your holiday goals, and list out the steps you need to take to reach them. Prioritize what is important, and get organized from the start.
- **Pace yourself.** Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's can all be busy times. Remember, the season lasts for several weeks. Get organized, and break your preparations into small steps so you can accomplish a little each week. Delegate responsibilities with others, and do not be afraid to ask for help.
- **Budget wisely.** It is easy to buy on credit and ignore the bills until after the holidays, but spending within your means requires a disciplined approach. Set a holiday budget limit ahead of time, and determine exactly what you can afford. Make a list of the items you want to buy before shopping and keep close tabs on what you spend.
- **Get into the spirit.** Deck the halls. Build a snowman. If you have a tree, decorate it early. Too often adults miss out on the simple pleasures of celebrating the holidays and truly enjoying the moment. Invoke the festive spirit of the occasion by getting excited about its rituals and revelries. Put the season into perspective by recalling the memories made and lessons learned from holidays past.
- **Take time out for yourself.** Too often the holidays feel rushed and exhausting. We are in a hurry to shop for presents, catch up at work and prepare for seasonal celebrations. Take the time to unwind and pamper yourself with a break from the action. Try relaxation techniques, meditation and deep-breathing exercises. Spend one quiet evening a week away from the hustle and bustle of your hectic routine. Do something you want to do.
- **Give of yourself.** One of the best gifts you can give yourself during the holidays is self-sacrifice. Try to find time during the season to volunteer your services at a local community center, soup kitchen or charity organization. Doing things for others can bring a real sense of inner warmth and self-worth that is more valuable than all the presents piled under your tree.

- **Embrace family.** Look forward to reuniting with relatives this holiday by sidestepping family pressures. Make a personal vow not to let personalities and differences of opinion get in the way of your merrymaking. Cherish the time you spend with your loved ones, and make a better effort to be as relaxed, positive and cheerful as you can.
- **Reflect on past holidays.** Think back to moments you have treasured during past holiday seasons, and try to recapture the essence of what made those times special. Try to think like a child again, and pay attention to the simple joys of the season. Look back at old pictures, watch an old family videotape or home movie and go through that drawer of keepsakes and mementos. Remember those occasions and people that made you feel special, and cherish those recollections.
- **Celebrate safely.** One of the keys to holiday happiness is celebrating in moderation. Give your body a gift this year by treating it with respect. Try not to overindulge in sweets and goodies. Know your limits when it comes to alcohol, and never attempt to drive if you have been drinking. Pace yourself this season by getting plenty of rest and remembering to exercise.
- **Make New Year's resolutions.** Setting goals challenges us to aim for higher fulfillment and self-improvement. Give yourself something to look forward to next year. Stick to these resolutions, and ask others to continue to encourage you to keep your goals.
- **Talk to someone who cares.** If you feel bogged down by a case of the holiday blues, do not suffer through the season. Reach out and talk to someone you trust. Confide in a close friend for support or advice. If the holidays trigger mental health problems or accompany the anniversary of a painful event, reach out to a therapist for professional support.
- **Breathe in the holiday air deeply, and exhale it humbly and slowly in everything you do.** Smile and wish a season's greetings to those you pass by, and be ever cognizant of the health and good fortune that shines upon you.

Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov
- Mental Health America: www.mentalhealthamerica.net
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: www.hhs.gov

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