



Coping with stress during the holidays



The holiday season is marketed as a time of great happiness and cheer but it can also be a time of immense stress for many people. Here are some tips to help deal with the stress during this busy time of year.

- **Surround yourself with people who make you feel happy**



It is important to try to surround yourself with others who make you feel good. Make sure to set aside time to spend with those friends and family who you enjoy spending in their company. If you do not have many people around for support then perhaps you can try to volunteer and get involved in giving back to the community so you are surrounded with others who are caring and want to help others. There are many other people you may know that may like to get together for a meal over the holidays—lots of people are living away from family and friends so you may be surprised how many other people in your social circles such as friends, acquaintances, neighbours, co-workers, who would be very happy to arrange a time to gather over the holidays.

- **Try to accept people for who they are**



The holiday stress is often due to the friction and stress of relationships. Even though you may not like the way someone behaves or their specific beliefs, try to put those differences aside for just one day. Avoid certain triggers and conversations which may lead to conflict. For the sake of the others and your own mental health, try to accept others for who they are. If there is a history of conflict then try your best to be cordial and choose to put aside those differences for another time for discussion. If you are feeling very stressed then take a break to regroup so that you do not get too stressed. Also try to be understanding towards others if they are feeling upset and/or anxious since the holidays are a time where others may also be feeling tense and depressed with all the demands and expectations.

- **Have realistic expectations**



The holiday season is marketed as a time of great cheer for all. There can be a great amount of pressure to have the perfect Christmas but this is not realistic to hold onto this ideal. Things may not go to plan such as a new recipe not turning out or a relative saying something that really offends you. Try to let the little things go and focus on the larger picture of enjoying the holidays even though they may not be entirely perfect. Families also grow and change so keep this in mind that traditions and rituals may change as well.

- **Plan ahead**



The holidays can be full of commitments such as attending parties, hosting parties, shopping, baking, etc. Try to set aside specific days for activities so that you have enough time to partake in the activities which you would like to be involved in. Schedule in set times to do things and make sure to plan ahead with lists so that you are not scrambling at the last minute to buy things such as ingredients for a recipe.

- **Learn to say no and set boundaries when needed**



There may be many activities and functions around the holiday season so it is okay to say no if you are feeling overwhelmed and cannot attend everything. If you say yes to particular things which you are not keen to do then you may feel very resentful, which will not make you happy.

Friends, family and colleagues are aware that there are many demands during the festive season so it is not possible to attend every function. It is also important to think about setting boundaries with family and friends if you do not want to partake in all festivities on offer. Perhaps you want to spend time with your own family before going over to the parents or in-laws, so try to be clear but thoughtful when informing others that you may not be able to participate fully in the way they would like. It is important to focus on what you feel is best for your own family's mental health rather than going along to something that you do not want to do and thus feeling resentful. Sometimes others will not understand or agree with your choices but this is not something that you have to take on board since you have a right to spend your time as you wish.

- **Give back to others**



Giving back to others helps focus on the real reason for the season rather than the over commercialization. Perhaps there is a neighbour or someone else you know who is lonely and isolated and has no one to spend the holidays with. It may be nice to invite the person over for a meal or take them out for an excursion in the community. There are also many community organisations that collect items for people who are experiencing disadvantage and volunteer opportunities. Even being extra friendly to those in everyday interactions such as on public transport, in shops, and smiling to people on the street can help boost mood and spread the holiday cheer.

- **Set a budget**



Look at your holiday budget realistically. If you do not have enough money to buy presents then you can speak honestly to others how you are not able to exchange presents this year. If there is still a group of people who want to exchange gifts then perhaps you can draw names so that you only have to buy one present and make sure to stick to a set price limit. It can also be beneficial to give other types of gifts such as offering to do childcare for someone, baking some cookies or other treats, offering to help tidy their house, etc. Even writing a note on a handmade card and letting someone know how much you value and care for them can be very special.

- **Take time out for yourself**



During all the holiday stress it is important to take out some time for just you. Do something that makes you feel relaxed such as watching a movie, reading a good book, going for a walk, or any other activity which you find enjoyable. It is necessary to recharge your batteries during this busy time of year and to focus on your own mental health and wellbeing. Try to carve out small opportunities throughout the day. It is not selfish to do so; it is necessary to look after your own health and emotional wellbeing so that you can also look after others and have the patience to deal with stresses you may experience.

- **Start new traditions with your family**



The holiday season can be a way to start new traditions in your family. Perhaps you could go to a church service, write a Christmas play, host a bbq, make crafts, bake some Christmas cookies, volunteer at a local charity, volunteer in the community, etc. There is no set way to celebrate the holidays so talk with your loved ones and friends about new traditions which you could partake in to make the holiday season more fun and enjoyable for everyone. There are many activities which do not cost money so be creative!



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- **Look after your physical health**



It is important to not put your physical health on the back burner during the holiday season. Make sure to limit the amount of food and alcohol you consume. Also try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day and enough sleep. Physical health and mental health are tied closely together so it is important to look after yourself. When the new year begins you do not want to feel as though you have overindulged and are having feelings of regret.

- **Make sure to have fun**



Try to find some time to have fun with others. You could watch Christmas movies, go on a picnic, explore a new suburb, go to the beach and check out any local activities over the Christmas season. There may be some local free activities such as carol singing, outdoor concerts or plays at local churches or schools.

- **It is okay to feel sad over the holidays**



It is important to acknowledge if you feel sad over the holiday season. Many people may feel depressed if they have recently lost a loved one and trying to cope with the reality of not having the person around anymore during this family oriented time. Many people may be isolated and not have family and friends to spend time with. Try to reach out to others in the community if you are feeling isolated and alone. There is help available if you are having a great deal of trouble coping with these feelings. Perhaps there is a good friend or family member who has a good listening ear, or a religious figure or other mentor who you can talk to about your feelings. Telephone counselling is also available. Do not feel guilty or ashamed about how you feel even if you feel as though you a lot to be grateful for in your life.

- **Recharge for the new year**



Take the holiday season as a time to recharge for the new year. Take time to relax if you are off from work. Also maybe you can start thinking about how you can improve your own health and wellbeing. Set goals which are realistic and take small steps to focus on improving your stress levels. Perhaps you could take up a new activity such as swimming or yoga, or starting a new hobby such as knitting or a sport.

- **Acknowledge your feelings**



It is important to acknowledge your feelings and be aware of how you feel. It is okay to feel a range of feelings. There seems to be so much pressure in society for people to be extremely happy and full of festive cheer but at times it can be a sad and stressful time for many. Reach out to others when you need to talk to someone. Also try to be in tune to your feelings so that you can recognise if you need to remove yourself from a situation or take a mental break.

- **Be prepared for how you would react to emergent stressful situations**



Be prepared if you find yourself in a situation which is extremely stressful and think about how you would respond. For instance, if a relative is being very combative at a gathering think about how you would react to keep your cool or how to exit a situation if you are finding yourself very stressed. It is important to look after your own mental health so if you feel you are having trouble coping in an environment, despite your best efforts, then remove yourself from the situation to try to distress. The stress of the holidays can also sometimes lead to volatile behaviours, especially if there are already tense relationships and with alcohol in the mix, so in these situations try to stay calm and contact outside support if needed to keep yourself and others safe (e.g. police, emergency services, mental health team).

If you are having trouble coping with the holiday season there are supports available

Telephone counselling available 24/7:

- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Salvo Care Line: 1300 363 622
- Mensline: 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Other supports:

- Talk to family, friends, neighbours, religious leaders if you are feeling distressed or mentally unwell
- Book an appointment with your GP or another clinic if you need medical help
- Contact the NSW Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511 to get in touch with the local mental health team(24 hrs)
- If it is a life threatening emergency then call 000

10 tips to stress less



TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF
HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE IMPERFECT
BE ACTIVE EVERY DAY IN AS MANY WAYS AS YOU CAN
REMEMBER, THIS TOO SHALL PASS
SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE WHO MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD
FOCUS MORE ON THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL
LAUGH OUT LOUD EACH DAY

