



Managing Holiday Stress

This guide provides tips for alleviating holiday-related tension before the pressures of the season become too difficult to manage.

Tips for Managing Holiday Stress

Consider the following:

- ◆ **Make a “to-do” list.** List the tasks that need to be done in order of their importance.
- ◆ **Don’t over-commit.** Don’t say yes to every holiday invitation. Pick the events and activities that are most important to you, and say no to others.
- ◆ **Get organized.** Keep all of your appointments clearly marked on one calendar and update it regularly.
- ◆ **Use down time to your advantage.** Cook and freeze meals for the week; fill your car with gas; take care of your laundry/dry cleaning; write holiday cards; shop; etc.
- ◆ **Simplify tasks.** Purchase food that is easy to prepare, combine errands into one trip, and set aside a block of time to do tasks (e.g., returning telephone calls, paying bills, etc.).
- ◆ **Ask for help.** If you are in charge of holiday meals, consider making it potluck or enlist the help of your family and/or friends.
- ◆ **Find “down” time.** Whether it’s taking a bubble bath or exercising, make time to relax, re-energize and refresh your body and mind.

- ◆ **Enjoy time with your loved ones.** It is easy to get caught up in the fast pace of the holiday season; take time out to spend quality time with family and friends.

Tips for Holiday Traveling

- ◆ **Make travel plans early.** Book airline flights and make reservations early to cut down on stress—and possibly save money.
- ◆ **Allow plenty of travel time.** Given the heavy volume of travelers, expect delays. Arrive early to avoid long lines, over-booked reservations, and to cut down on stress.
- ◆ **Anticipate traffic jams.** During the holidays, traffic volume is at its heaviest. Plan to carpool during the holidays to cut down on traffic, or bring along some music or books on cassette to help pass the time.

Tips for Holiday Shopping and Gift Giving

Finding, buying and wrapping holiday gifts can add stress to your daily schedule and your finances. Here are some tips for alleviating the stress of holiday shopping:

- ◆ **Shop early.** One of the greatest sources of holiday stress is last-minute shopping. Crowded malls, bumper-to-bumper traffic and packed parking lots can make shopping stressful. Create shopping lists before you go to the store, or try catalog or Internet shopping to save time and avoid crowds and long lines.

- ♦ **Be creative.** The money spent on gifts during the holiday season can overwhelm both you and your budget. To cut down on expenses, organize a gift-swap with family or friends; bake homemade cookies or candy; or make cards, gifts or crafts.
- ♦ **Wrap gifts as you buy them.** Instead of waiting for the last minute to wrap and decorate your gifts, do a little bit at a time.
- ♦ **Write out holiday cards in advance.** If you send holiday cards, start early or do a few each night to make it more manageable.
- ♦ **Mail presents and cards early.** If you need to send gifts, mail them ahead of time to ensure they arrive on time.

Taking Care of Yourself During the Holidays

In addition to staying organized, your best weapon for combating stress is maintaining healthy habits. Here are some suggestions for taking care of yourself during the holidays:

- ♦ **Get plenty of sleep.** In trying to keep up with your hectic holiday schedule, it can be difficult to get enough sleep. Remember that getting enough rest will help you stay alert and have enough energy to do all of the activities you enjoy.
- ♦ **Eat well.** Food is an integral part of every holiday tradition, but it is important to eat the foods you enjoy in moderation. Though you don't have to skip holiday treats altogether, avoid overeating which may make you feel sluggish and full.

- ♦ **Strive to be healthy.** Stress can cause a multitude of physical symptoms, including tension headaches, backaches, migraines, muscle cramps, difficulty sleeping and eating, etc. To help combat these symptoms, be sure to drink plenty of water, avoid excessive alcohol and get enough exercise.

Grieving During the Holidays

If you have lost a loved one, grieving can intensify during holiday times—which can also add to stress. Even though no one can take away your grief at these times, there are things you can do to make the holidays without your loved one less stressful.

- ♦ **Be honest about your feelings.** Decide how much celebrating you can handle and what feels most comfortable for you. For example, will you really be able to handle the responsibility of the annual family dinner? Do your best to surround yourself with people who wish to support you in what you need.
- ♦ **Make changes if necessary.** If you wish to continue the family traditions, do so; if you wish to make changes, that is okay, too. Visit friends or relatives for a holiday or anniversary instead of hosting others; open presents on Christmas morning as opposed to Christmas Eve; vary the timing of Chanukah gift giving; etc.

Holiday stress can be even more intense coupled with work or volunteer responsibilities. If possible, take time off from work or volunteer obligations to spend some time preparing for the holidays—and enjoying them. If you are unable to take time off, do your best to keep your to-do list manageable at home and do not over commit to personal responsibilities (cooking, entertaining, etc.) that will be too time-consuming and stressful.

- ◆ **Help Others.** Helping others can be a great way to heal your own pain. Volunteer, spend time with others less fortunate, or donate to charities.
- ◆ **Remember your loved one in a special way.** Perhaps include his or her name in a prayer before you eat; light a candle to symbolize your loved one's place at the table; or read aloud a poem. If it offers you comfort, reminisce with friends and family about your loved one or look through photo albums and scrapbooks.
- ◆ **Do your best to be positive.** Feel gratitude for the things that are going well in your life (health, job, friends, family, etc.). Remind yourself that you are allowed to experience joy and happiness. These feelings are not disrespectful to your loved one.
- ◆ **Recognize stress signals.** Learn to recognize your stress signals and alleviate contributors to your stress. If, for example, you are suffering from unusual or increased physical ailments, your body may be sending you signals that you are stressed. *Note*—If stress turns into severe anxiety and/or depression, seek professional help immediately.

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