

Coping With Holiday Stress

The holiday season can be a time of joy, but it can also be hectic and stressful. Use these nine tips to calm the pressure.

Most children wait eagerly for the holidays to arrive. Adults often have more mixed feelings. For them, the holidays mean increased stress: dashing to decorate the house, elbowing through crowds at the mall, and fretting about the right gift or how to pay for it.

Relax. Don't let stress suck the joy out of your holiday season. These tips can help you keep stress under control so your holidays can be merry and bright.

- 1 Create a game plan. Spend a little time up front getting organized. Make a list of what you need to buy. Try to shop ahead of time, before things are picked over and you're under pressure. If you'll be cooking, plan your menu. Think whether some items could be prepared ahead and frozen or refrigerated.
- 2. Make a budget and stick to it. Money is one of the major stressors during the holidays. Don't dig yourself into a hole by overspending. A thoughtful gift doesn't have to be expensive. If money is tight, suggest a family gift exchange with a spending limit.
- **3.** Accept reality. Guests may arrive late. Your mother may get on your nerves. The turkey may be dry. Real life isn't a holiday special. Don't expect perfect decorations, a perfect meal, or perfect people. Try to go with the flow and enjoy what you have.
- **4. Beware of unhealthy stress relievers.** Holiday stress causes some people to fall into bad habits such as smoking, drinking, or eating too much. Think about any unhealthy habits you're prone to and better ways to handle stress.
- **5. Create new traditions.** Stressed out by the usual festivities? Try something different. Instead of cooking a huge meal on your own, make it a potluck. Ask adults to bring gag gifts or have a "white elephant" or used book gift exchange. Attend a local holiday concert, walk the neighborhood to look at holiday lights, or go sledding.
- 6. Make time for your health. In the holiday rush, don't let your well-being fall by the wayside. Try to stay on your normal sleep schedule and get regular exercise. If you can't find a 30-minute chunk of time for exercise, break it up into three 10-minute sessions spread through the day.
- 7. Watch out for caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine can raise your stress and interfere with sleep. Alcoholic drinks contain lots of calories, and drinking too much may make you feel depressed. Instead, drink plenty of water or try herb tea or seltzer.



- **8. Give yourself a break.** In the midst of doing things for others, it's easy to forget to take care of ourselves. If you feel stress building up, get away for a few minutes. Find a quiet corner and do some deep breathing, listen to calming music, or just sit. Or throw on a coat and slip outside for a walk.
- **9 Enjoy!** The holidays are supposed to be a time of joy and togetherness. In the flurry of the holidays, we sometimes forget what we're celebrating. Remember to savor the time with people you love.



Source: "Coping with Holiday Stress", OptumHealth, 2011.

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Arleen Fitzgerald, L.I.C.S.W., Behavioral Health Consultant December 9, 2014, 12:30 p.m. ET, 11:30 a.m. CT

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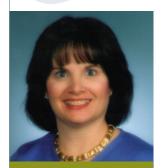
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Need energy for the holidays?

The holidays can be filled with joy as you spend time with loved ones, eat good food and observe important traditions. But, these activities may keep you on the go more than usual.

It's important to find ways to recharge your batteries. Here are helpful hints that can help keep you healthy and energized:

- **1.** Walk in a winter wonderland. Exercising every day will help you sleep better and feel more fit and full of pep. For safety's sake, however check with your doctor before significantly increasing your level of physical activity.
- **2. Don't fast and feast.** Try to refuel with small meals every three to four hours while you're awake. Fasting before a holiday meal may lead to overeating, so consider having a light snack beforehand.
- **3.** Take it easy with the sugarplums. You don't have to skip holiday desserts, but try to keep your fat and sugar intake low. Fill up on fruits, veggies and whole grains, and be sure to start the day with a nutritious breakfast.
- **4. Enjoy your nightly hibernation.** Try to sleep on a regular schedule. Don't eat for two to three hours before bedtime. Also, limit caffeine and alcohol they interfere with sleep.

These recommendations can provide health benefits beyond just boosting your energy. They also can help you feel better, maintain a healthy weight and prevent disease.

Source: Healthy Mind Healthy Body®, December 2008.

Manage holiday stress

Good sleep, a healthful diet and regular exercise are keys to helping you manage holiday stress.

In addition, these tips may help reduce your stress:

- ▶ Stick to your family's regular routine, when possible.
- ▶ Make priorities, and don't feel like you have to do everything.
- Stay within your budget. Make or do things together instead of spending money.
- ▶ Take time to relax. Play a board game, read a book, go for a walk or take a bath.
- Stretch tense neck and shoulder muscles when standing in line or sitting in traffic.
- Volunteer your time. Helping others may help rekindle the spirit of the holidays.



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