

Managing Holiday Stress

To cope with the additional stress brought on by the holiday season:

- 1. Think about how the holidays make you feel. Do they cause you anxiety, depression, or frustration?**
 - If you feel stressed: Plan ahead and simplify things.
 - If you become depressed: Focus on the present and don't compare this season to the good old days.
 - If you become frustrated: Adjust your expectations and realize that there is no such thing as a perfect celebration.

- 2. Define the true meaning of the holidays and the relationships you cherish most.**
 - Remember that you have choices, and the holidays don't have to mean the same thing to you as they do to others.
 - Think about how you want your season to be and what you want to do. Then focus on making that happen for yourself.
 - Replace traditions that have lost meaning with new ones. If traditions associated with the holidays are not meaningful any more or are painful, start new ones.
 - Eliminate things you do out of guilt or obligation. Do things motivated by genuine love or enthusiasm.

- 3. Repeat what worked last year.**
 - Think about the things that made you happy last year, and continue them this year.
 - Think about the people and activities that created stress and unhappiness, and plan to eliminate them. If those people create stress all year, think about why you still have them in your life.

- 4. Get into the holiday spirit by noticing what brings you joy--flowers, music, food, books, etc. Surround yourself with them as often as possible.**

- 5. Spend the holidays with people who are good for you--loving, supportive, fun, and interesting family, friends, and colleagues.**

- 6. Minimize the time you spend with people who are not good for you, family members who push your buttons, etc.**

7. Remember that it's ok to say no.

It's ok to refuse invitations, particularly from friends and family who create stressful environments for you. Forcing yourself to spend time with them will only interfere with your serenity. The holiday season is only once a year. Why not spend it the way that makes you the happiest?

8. Feel free to bow out.

Give yourself permission not to participate in holiday activities at all if you don't want to do so. Go away, get some good books to read, and save the money that would have been spent on gifts for something you've been needing.

The holiday season comes every year. It's fine to miss it this year if you just don't feel in the spirit.

9. Be realistic and set priorities.

- Don't expect perfection.
- Plan for a do-able December.
- Decide what is most important to you for the holidays. Trying to do it all will drain you. Prioritizing what's most important and eliminating some activities preserves your energy and creativity for what matters most.
- Simplify activities.
- Don't try to do it all yourself. Have potluck meals, eat out, etc.

10. Pace yourself.

- Break your preparations into small steps so you can accomplish a little each day/week.
- Plan ahead.
- Make lists.
- Delegate.
- Share the responsibility.
- Specifically request what help you need from others.

11. Don't forget to breathe.

When you feel overwhelmed or stressed, taking a few deep breaths will help you separate emotionally.

12. Nurture your body.

- Practice moderation. Too many sweets create sugar peaks and valleys in your blood that can take heavy toll on your moods.
- Consider nonalcoholic punch or sparkling water instead of automatically equating celebration with alcohol.
- Getting enough sleep and exercise are keys to stress management every day of the year, and especially with holiday excesses. Use the stairs instead of the escalator at the mall, take a brisk after-dinner walk, tape the late show, or catch a nap.
- Take a 15-minute sabbatical every day. Find a place you love and take time to be quiet, meditate, or just be alone.

13. Let go of things you can't control.

You can't control the behavior and attitudes of those around you.

14. Take time to reflect.

- Plan quiet moments alone or with your family and refrain from over-scheduling. Reading a book, listening to music, or renting a video can all provide a needed break.
- Allow yourself some reflection. The holidays represent markers in our lives. Recognize what you have achieved, not just what you haven't.

15. Keep a gratitude journal.

Write down three things you are grateful for every day. Read and reread your journal if you feel the holiday blues coming on.

16. Work on your own attitude.

Begin to think positively about the holidays, and determine that no one is going to bring you down this year.

17. Acknowledge and accept your feelings.

Forgive yourself if you are not always up and cheerful.

18. When all else fails, laugh at yourself and others.

Remember Santa's simple advice: Ho! Ho! Ho!

19. Carry the spirit into the new year.

With your family or friends, make a list of holiday likes and dislikes, and rely on it for next year. Set one or two goals to meet before the next holiday season. Make concrete resolutions and dates to attain your goals, and share them with others.

If you do manage the stress through the holidays, you won't feel such a let down when they are over; and you will have more to give back to family, friends, and work.