

HOLIDAY “SURVIVAL” STRATEGIES



Biggest Challenges relating to Holiday Stress

- Being away from a loved one, friends, and family
- Associating the holiday with family turmoil
- Facing an illness during the holiday season
- Feeling lonely or isolated from others
- Feeling anxious about social or financial obligations
- Drinking alcohol more heavily at social functions
- Managing a busy social schedule on top of other responsibilities
- Keeping up with a busy workload – shopping, baking, cleaning, and entertaining, for example.

Holiday Stats

While the holidays are synonymous with peace, love and joy for many Americans who celebrate, the holiday season is actually filled with physical and emotional discomfort.

In fact, 88 percent feel stressed when celebrating the holidays and the average couple will have seven arguments throughout the season, according to new research.

A study of 2,000 Americans examined the potential barriers to a harmonious and stress-free holiday and the topics and instances that often lead to the most stress and arguments, or “festive fallout” during the season. Results revealed that working out where to spend the holidays (35 percent) and how much money to spend on gifts (31 percent) are most likely to spark a squabble.

A study, regarding the top five things most likely to cause friction during the holidays rounded out with arguments over whose family to visit (29 percent), who cleans up (27 percent) and who cooks the holiday dinner (24 percent).

The survey also found that more than 15 percent admit that participating in conversation with family and friends stresses them out.

Fifty-six percent admit they have to bite their lip during the holidays to avoid arguments, and 64 percent report having certain conversations that are just off-limits.

The list of conversation topics to avoid was topped by politics (68 percent), followed by delving too deeply into someone's personal life (55 percent) and religion (47 percent).

The inevitable arguments with family aren't the only thing we dread about the holiday season, though.

Holiday stress seeps into many aspects of the season, including purchasing presents (39 percent), how much to spend (38 percent), prepping the house for guests (28 percent) and cleaning before and after gatherings (27 percent).

Almost half of respondents (47 percent) report being filled with dread when thinking of the amount of money they'll spend around the holidays.

And three in 10 are stressed by cooking holiday dinner, though that doesn't stop people from overindulging.

"From overeating to stressful activities, it's no surprise that the holiday season can trigger heartburn," said Michael Bachman, marketing director at Perrigo. "Luckily for frequent heartburn sufferers, store brand Omeprazole ODT is the first-of-its-kind dosage form.

"Our holiday gift to heartburn sufferers is a melt-in-your-mouth, more enjoyable way to treat your heartburn. Get back to enjoying the most wonderful time of year with a side of cranberry sauce, not heartburn."

A whopping 85 percent admit to overeating during the holidays, with nearly two-thirds feeling physically uncomfortable after eating a holiday meal.

In fact, 42 percent have had to unbutton their pants after a meal.

Nearly half of respondents (49 percent) confess they choose their holiday clothing based on what they plan on eating, with loose-fitting clothes (54 percent) and stretchy pants (39 percent) among the most popular fashion choices.

“It’s no secret that our ever-growing to-do lists, disagreements with loved ones and the pressure we place on ourselves to make the holidays great can all heighten stress and cause us to overeat!!!

When it comes to the holidays, results reveal that the most important parts are spending quality time with loved ones (82 percent), giving gifts to loved ones (56 percent) and being able to relax and recuperate (53 percent). And with holiday spirit comes good cheer – 65 percent report being more social over the holidays, going to an average of five parties during the season.

Take control of the holidays

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown.

With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

Even if you’re not where you want to be, try to have a good time while you’re there and smile. A little laughter will do you good. In fact, studies show that laughing out loud has real health benefits, so give it a shot.

If you’re at a party and it starts to feel a little too much, find a quiet room or corner. Take deep, calming breaths and focus on being present. You’ll be better equipped to handle social situations when you’re lucid.

Exercise

Exercise is a great mood booster; it’s especially helpful for those dealing with anxiety or depression. Try to get outside for a little air, even a brisk walk can raise your spirits. Try to walk in a natural area: People who went for a 90-minute walk outside in a natural environment have healthier brain activity than those who walked through an urban area. Not only is exercise great for SAD, it’s an excellent opportunity to clear your head.

Stick to a Healthy Diet

Holiday weight gain can be a result of stress or a stressor itself.^[13] It might be a challenge but you can always make healthy decisions; moderation is a great place to start. Take smaller servings, drink a glass of water before eating, and skip the seconds. If you cook, prepare dishes that are healthful, like this green bean salad recipe. If you’re feeling anxious, try these stress-relieving foods.

Remember What the Holidays Are all About

The holidays are supposed to be a time of celebration. Spend your holiday time relaxing and enjoying your friends and family. Indulge yourself a little but not too much. Relax, hydrate, rest, and have fun. Allow yourself to enjoy the holidays and you'll look forward to them every year. Don't abandon healthy habits.

Overindulgence can increase stress and guilt. Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all.

Contact a long-lost friend or relative and spread the holiday cheer!

SLEEP

The party season will be getting underway any minute now and with it comes late nights. As some of us begin to feel the pressure of the season on our shoulders, sleep deprivation may make the tiniest molehill look like a mountain.

A good night's sleep (anything between 7 – 9 hours of deep sleep) has amazing restorative powers and will provide us with the resiliency we may need to see ourselves to 2020 (with our nerves intact). If getting to sleep is a challenge, try turning off the screen 30-45 minutes before bedtime and/or have a hot shower or bath to help relax and induce sleep.

It might be tempting to stay up all night while you're on vacation, but regular sleep must be a priority, even on holidays.

Exhaustion makes everything more difficult – from driving to controlling your emotions. Even worse, ongoing sleep deprivation has been linked to heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, stroke, and kidney disease. Shoot for 7 to 8 hours every night.

Naps are Good!!! . . . legs up 15-20 min. max/close eyes...

Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list.

Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.

GET OUT OF THE HOUSE

Lack of sunlight is what causes a great deal of the winter blues. And if you're cooped up inside all day, not only are you cutting yourself off from all the serotonin benefits that vitamin D offers, but you'll also feel more overwhelmed without a change of scenery. Get out for a walk in the sunshine as much as you can in the winter, even a few minutes each day can truly make a difference!

If your schedule simply doesn't allow you to step outside in the winter during the limited daylight hours, then plan family outings to restaurants for dinner, or take a drive to look at Christmas lights at the local park. Getting out of the house and being around other people, even if you're not interacting, will boost your mood.

Unplugging to spend some time in nature is a great way to slow down overwhelming thoughts and reconnect with the present moment. A nice walk in the park – or even just around the block – can help remind you what really matters to you. It's even better if you can find a way to squeeze in some extra exercise while you're out, because endorphins are especially important in times of stress. "Physical exercise helps decrease stress hormones and builds a more resilient body and mind,

Go For a Walk

When our social lives get busy one of the first things to go is exercise. Let's face it, it is hard to keep to our workout commitment through the school pageants, house parties, and office events (and that's okay). While it may do our bodies some good to take a break from our fitness schedule, we can still reap the rewards of physical activity by going for a walk.

Walking will increase oxygen uptake, elevate our heart rates, enhance our mood, decrease our stress, and get us out in the fresh air.

Incorporate regular physical activity into each day. Taking a walk at night and stargazing.

Focus on gratitude

Remind yourself of everything that makes your life wonderful, and of exactly why you appreciate those things. Every morning (or just when you're feeling extra low), jot down a few things that you're grateful for. You may even enjoy sending a thank-you note to someone you love, or baking them a few extra holiday cookies.

GET QUIET

Don't feel guilty for needing downtime.

It doesn't have to be December to have a schedule that leaves no time to enjoy our families and ourselves. Although the holiday season offers many the opportunities to slow down, it also brings a number of social commitments that can leave us feeling drained.

No matter what the personality type, we all need time to rest and recreate. By allowing some space between festivities we are more able to take a breath and get our groove back. Remember, it isn't the quantity, but the quality of social experiences that leads to a sense of connection with others.

There is a big difference between holiday stress and full-blown Seasonal Affective Disorder. The winter season, accompanied by lack of sunlight and a never-ending to-do list can take a toll, and Choices Psychotherapy can help.

Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

Express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well.

Set aside differences. Accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry.

"**Start each day** focusing on what really matters,""It's critical to intentionally direct your attention to the things that are most important to you before you allow your brain to get taken over by the negative news and noise of the world."

This is especially true this time of year, when you're regularly bombarded with holiday advertisements and bright lights everywhere you turn. People experiencing extra stress set aside three to five minutes every morning to "[meditate] on what you appreciate in life, and plan time throughout the day to do nice things for others."

There is no greater buffer to stress than serving others. Volunteering, even for an hour or two every few weeks, is an excellent way to escape the trappings of your own stressed-out mind. If it's tough to squeeze volunteer work into a packed holiday schedule, find time to be kind to others in your everyday life. Holding the door for a stranger or paying for the person behind you on the coffee shop line may not make all your stressors magically disappear, but it certainly helps lighten your emotional load – and it's guaranteed to brighten someone else's day, too.

In this 24/7 world, most of us are constantly on the go. Mix in a whirlwind of holiday parties and gift shopping, and that breakneck pace becomes even more difficult to maintain. It's completely human – and healthy – to take periodic breaks to rest up. "Build in some extra downtime to recharge your inner battery," Hanna suggests. "Be sure to get enough sleep to repair your system." Aim to get 7.5 to 9 hours of shut-eye each night.

Get organized. Think about the things you really need and want to do. Prioritize, make lists, and make a schedule. What gets done gets done, but if you're organized and have prioritized everything, then you are much more likely to get the really important things done.

Simplify and streamline. Adjust your expectations and try to focus on the things that are really important and jettison the rest. Think quality over quantity. Maybe get the same gift for everyone or cut the list back a bit. Do you really need to do everything you think you do? Try to do with less.

Delegate. You don't have to do everything. Get your spouse or family members to share the workload, and then make peace with the results.

Take time to look around. Literally. Stop what you are doing and look at the decorations and the pretty lights. Listen to holiday music. Window shop. Go to church or temple. Do something holiday-ish, like take the kids for a drive around town to see the lights. Take the time to enjoy the beauty of the season.

Keep it simple at work, and remember the rules: don't buy your boss a gift (unless you pull her name in the Secret Santa), keep the holiday displays at home, don't get drunk at the office party, etc. Speaking of the office party, remember that even though it is a social event, it is still work, so be on your best behavior. It's a great opportunity to socialize, network, and develop relationships.

Be good to yourself. Remember to take care of yourself this time of year. In addition to the stresses of the season, colds and flu are likely going around too, so be sure to take good care of yourself. And maybe even get yourself a little something. You deserve it!

INCREASE FACE-TO FACE INTERACTION

Put down the cell phone. Take a few hours a day (and when you're asleep doesn't count) to power down and step away from the demands of your schedule. Planning out an activity without actually sitting down to discuss it with someone makes it more hectic for everyone involved.

In a similar vein, when you're asking for help with an activity, don't send out a group text or email. Sit down with a friend over coffee and explain why help would be appreciated. Your friend will be more likely to help if you ask in person.

FOOD OPTIONS

Eat more spicy food. They've been shown to trigger endorphins.

Honey. Honey contains antioxidants and boosts your immune system. This is even more important in the wintertime when flu season is at its peak.

Breakfast before coffee. We've all gotten that jittery irritability after downing our morning coffee without any food in our stomach. When you're dealing with stress from the holidays, it's even more important to make time for breakfast.

Watch your food selections. Winter is a sneaky season. One sign of SAD that many individuals know about, but often don't notice until it's too late, is a craving for food with high levels of carbohydrates (think chocolate and pasta).

We've all heard the term "holiday weight," but is that really the case? Some individuals suffering from SAD can gain from 10-15 lbs in a winter season! So when you're reaching for the cookies. . . eat a vegetable.

With all the home baked goodies at work and home, it may be challenging to remember to eat our veggies. Chronic ingestion of chocolate, cookies, and fruit cake may be lovely in the moment, but can lead to fatigue, gastrointestinal challenges, and even depression.

It may be necessary to plan a few meals during the day that include as many servings of veggies as possible or prepare a plate of veggies with dip to sit on the kitchen counter for munching (instead of the chips). By keeping up with our healthy eating regime, it will be easier to sustain our energy levels through the festive season.

Top "low stress" holiday foods

Brazil nuts... High in selenium.... An antioxidant that lowers stress to the cells.

Pumpkin seeds... Excellent source of potassium to control blood pressure, lowering anxiety.

Eggs... Contain tryptophan, a precursor of serotonin, which regulates mood, sleep, memory.... Relieves anxiety.

Dark chocolate... Contains polyphenol...which act as an anti-inflammatory, lowering cellular stress. Contains high levels of tryptophan . . . good source for magnesium.

Turkey... Tryptophan.

Turmeric... Reduces oxidative stress and lowers anxiety and depression.

Fatty fish... High in omega-3 fatty acids, which help to balance with the Omega 6 fatty acids and lower anxiety and depression. If the Omega 6's are allowed to increase without this buffer... Increases anxiety.

Chamomile... Contain flavonoids which are known to lower the stress response in humans.

Green tea... Often craved by ex-coffee drinkers... Contains an amino acid called theonine, which is known to increase serotonin, reducing anxiety.

BE REALISTIC

The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.

For example, if your adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos.

Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for party prep and cleanup.

Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.

Try these suggestions: Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.

HOLIDAY WHOA'S . . . INTERNAL CHAOS

Acknowledge your feelings.

If a loved one recently died or you aren't near your loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness or grief. Allow yourself to cry every now and then.

You can't force yourself to be happy just because it is the holiday season.

If you feel isolated or down, seek out family members, friends, community, religious or social support and companionship. If you are lonely, volunteer to help others. Getting involved and helping others can lift your spirits and broaden your social circle.

Make realistic expectations and goals for the holiday season and yourself.

Pace yourself – do not take on more responsibility than you can handle.

Make a list and prioritize important activities. This helps make tasks more manageable.

Do not put all of your energy into just one day (i.e. Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, etc.).

Set aside differences. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion.

And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.

Don't set yourself up for disappointment and sadness by comparing today with the good old days of the past.

Stick to a budget

Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.

Plan ahead.

Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends, and other activities.

Plan menus and then make one big food-shopping trip.

Try these alternatives: Give homemade gifts, start a family gift exchange, donate to a charity in someone's name.

LEARN TO SAY NO

Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed.

Believe it or not, people will understand if you can't do certain projects or activities.

Say yes only to activities you really want to do – you'll avoid feeling resentful or overwhelmed.

With the holiday season comes the pressure to entertain, be entertained, and give of our money and ourselves. For some, this comes naturally, but for others it leaves them feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and stressed out.

Establishing personal boundaries for ourselves is one of the best things we can do for our health during the holidays. Learning to say “no” more often will only leave us with more time to focus on what is most important. Begin by drafting up a list of the important events (a grocery list so to speak) and refer to it when other offers arise. It is much easier to stick to a plan if you have one.

If it's impossible to say no, try to remove something from your agenda to make up for lost time.

Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity.

MAKE TIME FOR YOU

Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

If you feel overwhelmed, don't hesitate to take a few moments for yourself. Holiday parties and preparations can be draining and you can only help others after you take care of yourself. Set aside time to take in a yoga class or meditate. Schedule an aromatherapy massage as a gift to yourself.

It can't be said enough: Exercise. Don't try to do it all. Set aside time to do things for you. Organize your to-do list and don't commit to more than you can handle. Staying organized and on top of your schedule greatly reduces your stress level.

Watch or listen to things that bring you joy.

Listening to soothing music.

Getting a massage.

Reading a book.

It's hard to remember now, but at one point, you'd never heard the words "bills" or "work deadlines" before, and this season was solely about candy canes and whimsy. Take yourself back to the holidays of your childhood by carving out time to enjoy things that make you happy. "Put together a positivity playlist, with songs that inspire you or help you unwind." Pop on your favorite holiday tunes.

For many of us during the holidays, we commit to a number of parties; only to deeply regret our decisions when the time comes to dress up and go. We quickly find ourselves suffering at the hand of loud and crowded parties dreaming of sweatpants, a good movie, and a big bowl of popcorn. Sound familiar?

The old adage of helping ourselves first before helping others applies to the holiday season as well. If our instinct is declining the party for the couch and a comforter, we may be in great need of some rest and relaxation. Once we care for ourselves we can more effectively care for our families (and enjoy every minute of it).

IT'S OKAY TO AVOID THE HOLIDAYS

From holiday TV specials to the seasonal movies depicting tight knit families enjoying each other's company, we are inundated with messages on how we should act and feel during the season. For many people the holiday season isn't so much tied to love and harmony but to loss and loneliness.

Feeling the pressure from outside factors to conform to the glad tidings of the season may only feed into existing depression or sadness. Accepting our feelings may be one of the ways we can break free of the holiday "shoulds" and allow ourselves this time to do what we need to do. There are times when seasonal celebration isn't what we need...and that's okay.

Holiday Stress for Seniors

Nearly everyone looks forward to the holiday season – but not necessarily to the stress it seems to bring along. Your life may already feel like a pressure cooker as you juggle your senior loved one's needs with those of your family, your career and yourself. Add in holiday stress related to shopping, cooking and traveling, and it might be easy to overlook the stressors that could be hindering your senior loved one's ability to enjoy the holidays to the fullest.

Holiday-related stress may look different seniors than it does to caregivers. Seniors may not feel the pressure of shopping for the perfect gift or of planning the ideal family dinner, but they may feel sadness or anxiety – two emotions that can prevent them from feeling happy during the holidays.

The good news is you may be able to minimize these stressors for your senior family members without adding to your own holiday strain. Here are four types of holiday stress seniors might have to cope with – and what you can do to help.

1. Grief

The holidays bring about memories of beloved friends and relatives who have passed on. Seniors may particularly miss their late spouse at this time of year. Even if a senior family member lost his or her spouse many years ago, they may find themselves grieving again at the holiday season.

To help a senior family member cope with holiday grief that involves the loss of a spouse, consider talking about it. Caregivers often worry about upsetting their loved one, but "sharing the sorrow" by encouraging seniors to tell stories about their deceased loved one can be a good way to help them grieve, according to Mental Health America. You might start by asking the senior if he or she is

thinking about his or her late spouse, or share your own happy holiday anecdote involving the deceased loved one.

2. Dietary Concerns

Picture the holiday dinner table set for the entire family, with all kinds of delicious foods and traditional recipes made especially for the occasion.

Now imagine surveying that table with a sense of anxiety about how a favorite family dish might upset your stomach because of a new medication you're taking. Or, the fear of eating a food you used to enjoy that now upsets your stomach or gives you diarrhea.

Many factors can influence the types of food a senior is able to eat. Problems with chewing or swallowing may make it difficult for them to eat "regular" food. Medical conditions and medications may restrict a senior's diet. A senior's digestive tract simply may not function as well as it used to function. As a result, senior family members may worry about whether a holiday gathering will include foods they can eat safely and without the fear of post-meal discomfort.

You can help relieve this anxiety by asking about the senior's dietary requirements in advance. Find out if a senior family member must avoid certain foods, or if he or she will need a selection of soft foods like mashed potatoes. Then, make it a point to incorporate some senior-friendly dishes into your family dinner so that everyone can enjoy it.

3. Mobility Concerns

Seniors who have fallen in the past or who use an assistive device like a cane or walker may wonder if they will be able to attend holiday gatherings held in a location unfamiliar to them, like the home of a relative they've never visited. They may be concerned about whether or not they will have to go up and down stairs or how far they will need to walk in order to get from the car to the party. They also might worry about their safety if they have to walk through snow or other slippery conditions to get from the car to the door.

Giving seniors information in advance can help them avoid stressing over these issues. Describe the places where they will be attending each party, church service or other holiday-related event. Tell them about possible issues like stair steps or long stretches of walking. Then, work together to formulate a plan that addresses these issues in a way that enables the senior to enjoy the activity instead of worrying about whether or not his or her legs will hold up.

4. End-of-Life Thoughts

Senior family members may experience bittersweet feelings about the holidays. On the one hand they may enjoy gathering with their families, but on the other hand they may wonder if this will be "the last" holiday for them.

Talking about death is hard, and you may not want to come right out and ask a senior loved one if he or she is feeling this way. Instead, you can ask them what you can do to make the holiday as special as possible for them. This approach allows them to make specific suggestions for things they may want to experience “one last time,” such as enjoying a unique family recipe, listening to particular music or participating in a specific activity like looking through photo albums.

Seniors deserve to enjoy the holidays without feeling stressed. With a little forethought about the anxieties that may be sapping your loved one’s happiness, you can make the festive season as enjoyable for him or her as possible.

Have any of your senior family members ever talked about the stress they feel during the holiday season? What stressed them out the most? How did you deal with it?

Focus on the Positive and Smile

You can’t control everything, so focus on the positive and make the best of things. Whether you’re the guest or the host, make peace with the old tensions that keep you from feeling at ease. Finding common ground is one of the best ways to bond with those who have different beliefs or opinions.

Let the Good In

Let the Bad Out

Keep the Good In

Keep the Bad Out