

Keeping the Holidays Healthy and Happy

No matter what, this holiday season will look different than previous ones. There is no avoiding the COVID-19 pandemic. But you can still make this season a bright and bountiful one by giving yourself the best present of all: peace of mind.

One of the most important things you can do is manage your own expectations. Understand right away that there will be constraints on gatherings, shopping trips and other holiday activities we've come to take for granted. The upside is that, thanks to these limitations, it will be easier to make your holidays a happy, stress-free time by taking care of yourself, bringing balance to your work and home life and keeping worries from overwhelming you.

Tips for Coping with Holiday Stress This Year

- **Do not be perfect; be you.** One of the quickest ways to holiday burnout is to set high, unrealistic expectations for yourself. Make your plans simple and your activities doable.
- **Create your wish list early.** Ask yourself what you want to accomplish this holiday season. Write down your holiday goals, and list out the steps you need to take to reach them. Prioritize what is important, and get organized from the start.
- **Pace yourself.** Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's Eve can all be busy times. Remember, the season lasts for several weeks. Break your preparations into small steps so you can accomplish a little each week. Delegate responsibilities with others, and do not be afraid to ask for help.
- **Budget wisely.** It is easy to buy on credit and ignore the bills until after the holidays, but spending within your means requires a disciplined approach. Set a holiday budget limit ahead of time, and determine exactly what you can afford.
- **Get into the spirit.** Deck the halls. Build a snowman. If you have a tree, decorate it early. Too often adults miss out on the simple pleasures of celebrating the holidays and truly enjoying the moment.
- **Take time out for yourself.** Too often the holidays feel rushed and exhausting. Unwind and pamper yourself with a break from the action. Try relaxation techniques, meditation and deep-breathing exercises. Spend one quiet evening a week away from the hustle and bustle of your hectic routine. Do something you really want to do.
- **Give of yourself.** One of the best gifts you can give yourself during the holidays is self-sacrifice. Try to find time during the season to volunteer your services. Doing things for others can bring a real sense of inner warmth and self-worth that is more valuable than all the presents piled under your tree.
- **Embrace family.** Look forward to reuniting with relatives this holiday even if you have to do it via video chat or just on the telephone. Cherish the time you spend with your loved ones, and make a better effort to be as relaxed, positive and cheerful as you can.
- **Reflect on past holidays.** Think back to moments you have treasured during past holiday seasons, and try to recapture the essence of what made those times special.
- **Celebrate safely.** One of the keys to holiday happiness is celebrating in moderation. Give your body a gift this year by treating it with respect. Try not to overindulge in sweets and goodies. Know your limits when it comes to alcohol, and never attempt to drive if you have been drinking.
- **Exercise.** It is important to stick to an exercise plan even when the holiday season kicks into full swing. The holidays can be a good time to start an exercise program, since exercise can help to relieve stress.
- **Make New Year's resolutions.** Setting goals challenges us to aim for higher fulfillment and self-improvement. Give yourself something to look forward to next year. Stick to these resolutions, and ask others to continue to encourage you to keep your goals.
- **Talk to someone who cares.** If you feel bogged down by a case of the holiday blues, do not suffer through the season. Reach out and talk to someone you trust.