



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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