



WASHINGTON HEALTH SYSTEM
Center for Mental Health and Wellbeing

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



Stress, depression and the holidays: Tips for coping

Stress and depression can ruin your holidays and hurt your health. Being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support can help ward off stress and depression.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. The holidays often present a dizzying array of demands — cooking meals, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few. And if coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is spreading in your community, you may be feeling additional stress, or you may be worrying about your and your loved ones' health. You may also feel stressed, sad or anxious because your holiday plans may look different during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. You may even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you would.

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.

- **Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones for other reasons, 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 or communities. Many may have websites, online support groups, social media sites or virtual events. They can offer support and companionship.

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If you're feeling stress during the holidays, it also may help to talk to a friend or family member about your concerns. Try reaching out with a text, a call or a video chat.

Volunteering your time or doing something to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. For example, consider dropping off a meal and dessert at a friend's home during the holidays. Continued on page 2.

December
2021



Month

National Stress-Free
Family Holidays
Month

Day

World AIDS Day
(Dec. 1)

International Day of
Persons With
Disabilities (Dec. 3)

Human Rights Day
(Dec. 10)

To learn more visit:

<https://sacwellness.com/mental-health-awareness-calendar/>

- **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 or other relatives can't come to your home, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos. Or meet virtually on a video call. Even though your holiday plans may look different this year, you can find ways to celebrate.
- **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.
- **Stick to a budget.** Before you do your 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. Try these alternatives:
 - Donate to a charity in someone's name.
 - Give homemade gifts.
 - Start a family gift exchange.
- **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, connecting with friends and other activities. Consider whether you can shop online for any of your items. 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 meal prep and cleanup.
- **Learn to say no.** 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. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
- **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 meals so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.
 - Eat healthy meals.
 - Get plenty of sleep.
 - Include regular physical activity in your daily routine.
 - Try deep-breathing exercises, meditation or yoga.
 - Avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol and drug use.
 - Be aware of how the information culture can produce undue stress, and adjust the time you spend reading news and social media **as you see fit**.
- **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Find an activity you enjoy. Take a break by 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. Some options may include:
 - Taking a walk at night and stargazing
 - Listening to soothing music
 - Reading a book
- **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

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. To read the full article, please visit: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>

Washington County has the following Holiday Events:

- December 3rd – 2021 Downtown Washington Christmas Parade & Holiday Market
- December 3rd – Canonsburg's Old Fashioned Christmas
- December 3rd – Christmas Festival at Shady Elms Farm
- December 3rd – A Dreamers Christmas Vacation at Nineteen North
- December 3rd – Trolleys and Toy Trains at Pennsylvania Trolley Museum
- December 4th – Breakfast with Santa at Thomas Presbyterian Church
- December 4th – Cocoa Crawl and Christmas Parade in Downtown Fredericktown
- December 4th – Pajamas with Santa at Tanger Outlet Center
- December 9th – “Christmas Belles” at Little Lake Theatre

To learn more visit:

<https://www.visitwashingtoncountypa.com/events/holidays/?view=grid&sort=date&skip=12&bounds>

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WAYS TO EASE HOLIDAY STRESS

Does just thinking about the holidays stress you out? You're not alone. Fortunately, there are things you can do to mitigate stressors and make the holidays a fun and relaxing time.



1 PLAN AHEAD AS A GROUP.

Stressful arguments and hurt feelings about where, when and how to spend holiday time can be avoided by planning ahead and including as many people as possible in the discussion.

2 MANAGE EXPECTATIONS.

Keep in mind that the goal of the holidays should be to enjoy your time together. Avoid trying to cram in too many activities or make every meal and get together perfect.



3 HEAD OFF PERSONAL CONFLICTS.

Agree to take hot-button issues — political or otherwise — off the table. Keep in mind that you can love someone even if you don't like their views on particular topics.



4 IF CONFLICTS DO ARISE, STAY CALM.

If you or other family members get into a fight, do what you can to keep or regain everyone's composure before moving forward.

That may mean removing yourself from the situation for a while by going for a walk or engaging in some other soothing activity.

When you come back, it will be easier to see one another's points of view, and come up with creative solutions and compromises.



6 REMEMBER TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

It's easy to let healthy habits slide during the holidays, indulging more than usual, staying up later or dropping our exercise routines. However, taking care of your physical and mental health can be an antidote to holiday strain.



5 FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES.

Inevitably, something will go wrong with our holiday plans—a flight will be delayed, cookies will get burnt, a gift will be out of stock. Don't let these hiccups overshadow the positive aspects of the holidays, such as spending quality time with family and friends.



6 Easy Tips for Reducing Holiday Stress

1. When you wake up in the morning, stop and take a moment to say good morning to your day.
2. If you are in a relationship, take a few minutes to really look at and appreciate your significant other.
3. If you are deployed with your unit, pause to think about how your buddies support and help one another to get through a rough day.

4. Take a moment to be grateful. Before you eat lunch, reflect for a moment and think about something that keeps you going everyday.
5. At dinner, spend a moment thinking about your loved ones. Have you told them lately something you appreciate about them?
6. Finally, before you go to sleep, acknowledge something about yourself you're proud of.





Dear Valued Referral Source,

May the holiday season bring you and your family joy, peace and happiness throughout this year and 2022. Thank you for your continued support and referrals.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Campbell, MSW, LSW

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Greene County Crisis Line: 1-800-417-9460

Washington County 24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 1-877-225-3567

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Greenbriar Treatment Facility: 1-800-637-4673

STTARS Sexual Assault Hotline (Greene & Washington): 1-888-480-7283