

The Holidays are Coming! Here's How to Cope



It's almost here. The holiday season. Family gatherings, shopping, entertaining, travel – it's not always joyous and can often be rather exhausting. According to a [poll](#) by the American Psychiatric Association, 41% of respondents say their stress increases at this time compared with other points in the year.

Stress is experienced in different ways for different people. For some, the pressure to find the perfect gift leaves many concerned about their finances. Others might experience loneliness with the stress of missing family or loved ones. Still others might dread having to hear yet another story (or worse the same one) from a cherished family member around the dinner table.

Although the holidays might increase stress levels, it's also a great time to strengthen our relationships and traditions. This can improve our physical and mental well-being which will prepare us to manage stress year-round.

So let's not forget to put the cheer back into the holidays. There will be the inevitable bumps, but with planning and the right attitude these holiday hiccups can be managed.

Here are 8 ways to manage stress during the holiday season like a pro:

Set Realistic and Clear Expectations

Communicate your expectations and comfort level to the family early on. Make them aware of your limitations. No holiday gathering is perfect, so take the pressure off yourself. Set a schedule but be flexible. Use any mistakes as a way to build your resilience. Pare down your expectations, and don't feel the need to take on everything. Identify the most important holiday tasks and take small clear steps to accomplish them.

Take Shortcuts

It's easy to feel overwhelmed so pare down the "to do" list. Rather than sending cards to everyone, limit your list to those you know really well. Baking can be fun but it's also very time consuming. Why not skip some of the cookie baking this year and hit up your local bakery instead? Instead of decorating the whole house, why not just focus on one room? Taking the time to limit your "must" activities will leave you more time to enjoy the season.

Take Time for Yourself

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Take breaks and get enough sleep. Exercise and eat well. Look for activities that are fun and energize you. Try yoga or spend time in nature. By keeping your body and mind healthy, you'll be better prepared to handle stressful situations when they arise. Take time to give yourself the greatest gift of all – peace.

Keep Things in Perspective

When it comes down to it, the holiday season is short. Maintain a longer-term perspective. What's the worst thing that could happen? Our biggest fears may not happen and, if they do, we can gather our strengths or count on the help of others to manage them.

There will be plenty of time after the holidays to catch up on any activities we may have missed or did not have time to do.

Manage the Holiday Feasts

Easier said than done – but in the long run you'll be happy you pared down the temptation. The stress of the holidays can often bring on overeating, so just be mindful of how much you're putting into your body. Try to have some healthy food on hand for each meal. Before you head to a party, have a snack before you go. That way, you'll be less likely to fill up on sweets. Have fun, but approach holiday meals with moderation.

Strategize Travel Plans in Advance

No matter how you travel, preparation is key. Book seats in advance to ensure everyone can sit together. Aim for the earliest departure time if you're concerned about delays. If possible, avoid checking a bag. Check the weather report before you go and prepare accordingly. Drivers should always have water, snacks, a light source and a blanket in case there's a roadside issue. Check your car battery, tire pressure and windshield fluid before you go.

Set an Exit Strategy

Plan an exit strategy if you start to feel overwhelmed during family gatherings. This might include a signal to your friend or partner that it's time to go. Even if you don't

leave the gathering entirely, sometimes just leaving the room for a few minutes is all you need to gather your thoughts – and sanity!

Practice Gratitude

Focus on the positive aspects of the season. Being grateful – if even for a moment – can help shift your perspective. Before meals, thank the person who prepared it – even if it was you! Remember that (whether good or bad) most people are trying to show you that they care. Develop an attitude of gratitude and you may find it will spread quickly!

The holidays can often leave us feeling overwhelmed as there's a lot of pressure in a short amount of time. Remember that amidst all the chaos, there are ways to stay happy and healthy. Stressful things will happen, but you get to choose how you respond to them. Follow these strategies and discover how to change the dreaded holiday "Oh no!!!" into a way of reclaiming your ho-ho-ho!!!