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.

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests – stress and depression.

The holidays present a dizzying array of demands – parties, shopping, baking, cleaning, and entertaining, to name just a few.

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**

1. **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.

2. **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 is a good way to help lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

3. **Be realistic.** The holidays don’t have to be perfect or just like last year. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.

4. **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.

5. **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.

6. **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-minutes scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients.

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7. **Learn to say “no”**. Saying “yes” when you should say “no” can leave you feel resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can’t participate in every project or activity.

8. **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:
   
   - Having a healthy snack before going to parties
   - Get plenty of sleep
   - Incorporate physical activity into your day

9. **Take a breather**. Make some time for yourself. Spending 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough.
   
   Some options:
   
   - Take a walk at night and stargaze
   - Listen to soothing music
   - Get a massage
   - Read a book

10. **Seek professional help if needed**. 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.

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