



Celebrating the Holiday Season – The Healthy Way

As the holiday season approaches, many people anticipate times of happiness, good cheer, and excitement shared with friends and family. However, the holidays also can bring feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress. Following are some causes that can trigger holiday stress.

- Remembering past losses
- Trying to accomplish too much
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Financial difficulties
- Unrealistically high expectations
- Currently feeling, or anticipating, a significant loss
- Comparing your past life with your current situation

Coping with Holiday Stress

Here are some ways that you can battle your stress during the holiday season.

1. **Try to eat and drink in moderation.** It's easy to find yourself eating more than you normally would because of the abundance of food. Try to keep your portions small, and avoid some of the richer desserts. You should also consider watching how much alcohol you may use, as excessive alcohol use can increase feelings of depression.
2. **Don't isolate yourself.** If you're alone on the holidays, find ways to keep yourself busy. Try inviting others to get together or volunteer for a worthy cause so you can experience the power of giving.
3. **Make time for regular exercise.** If you already exercise, try to keep your regular schedule despite the chaos of the holiday season. If you don't exercise, try including some light exercise into your daily routine - even a short walk with a friend can help reduce stress and increase your mood.
4. **Remember lost loved ones through positive memories.** By focusing on positive memories, you can make these remembrances part of your family traditions.
5. **Take a good look at your holiday traditions.** Are there any traditions or activities that can be modified? Complicated meals and elaborate gift giving can raise your stress and anxiety levels. Consider simplifying your meals and celebrations.
6. **Don't expect a perfect holiday.** Unrealistic expectations for holidays can add to your stress level.
7. **Find time to relax** - even if only for a short period of time. Take time to get away from the extra chaos the holidays often generate by taking a nap, reading a book, or going for a walk.
8. **Plan ahead.** By planning ahead and not waiting until the last minute to finish your holiday preparations, you can save both time and money. Also, try making some fun plans for after the holidays to reduce the effects of a possible post-holiday let down.

If you are feeling down or stressed, give some of these self-help strategies a try. It's important to remember, however, that if you feel down for more than a few weeks, or if you are experiencing changes in sleeping or eating patterns, talk to your health care provider.

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