



Coping with the Holidays



Happy Holidays?

We all strive to make the holidays the best time of the year. There is an expectation to have the perfect holiday for ourselves, family and friends. This often unrealistic goal is reflected in movies, television, books, stories of holidays past and our own internal ideals.

But, we all too readily find out that this goal of achieving the perfect holiday is only a myth. With our fast paced lifestyles, we do not have the time or energy to do everything. Baking homemade treats, finding perfect gifts, decorating, entertaining our friends, and working full or part-time jobs, leaves little time for ourselves.

This booklet offers suggestions on how you and your family can “Cope with the Holidays.” You will be able to reduce your stress level by following a few simple tips. By watching what you spend, eat, drink, and, in general, just taking charge of your life, will help you to better enjoy the season!



Stress and the Holidays

The holiday season is ideally the happiest time of the year. However, it is often one of the most difficult, and depression is surprisingly widespread. One explanation for the “unexplainable” depression is expecting too much! When we are bombarded with, “Tis the season to be jolly,” and we feel less than jolly, we sense that something must be wrong. The holidays, in fact, become a time of “too much” - doing too much, eating too much, drinking too much, and spending too much.

Tips for Beating Holiday Stress

1. Practice moderation in your activities, as well as in eating, drinking, and spending. Don't get overtired.
2. Prioritize your preparations. List what must be done and what would be nice to do. As pressures mount, relax and concentrate on the must list.
3. For an extra “lift” surprise someone with unexpected kindness. It will make his/her day -- and your holiday.
4. Keep reminding yourself of what the holiday season is all about.
5. Enjoy free holiday activities, such as admiring holiday decorations or visiting with friends.
6. Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you. Make new friends if you are alone during special times. Contact someone you have lost touch with.
7. Don't drink too much. Excessive drinking will only make you more depressed.
8. Don't be afraid to try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a way you have not done before.
9. Find time for yourself! Don't spend all your time providing activities for others.

Taking Charge

Taking charge of your life will help you reduce stress. For some people, being assertive is very hard. However, not being assertive during the holidays and trying to please, often brings financial problems, depression, and physical illness.

Ten Ways to "Take Charge" during the Holidays

1. Know your needs and ask people to help you meet them.
2. Don't expect more from others than you are willing to give yourself.
3. Have a plan of action to help you enjoy the holidays.
(Who, How, What, When)
4. Think positively about yourself, your family, your friends, and your situation.
5. Take advantage of things available that do not cost money.
(concerts, displays, etc.)
6. Don't compare yourself to others.
7. Plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time to coordinate activities.
8. Count your blessings - see the cup as half full, rather than half empty.
9. Learn to live more with less.
10. Pat yourself on the back for getting through another holiday.



Dealing with a Loss or Change

The holidays can be painful for those who have lost a loved one or gone through divorce, especially children. Coping with separation and loss is magnified during the holidays. People may feel pressured to celebrate the holidays, while their world seems to be falling apart.

How to Help Someone Deal with Grief

1. Allow them to talk about their feelings and memories, and try to get them involved in new activities.
2. Change your traditional pattern in some way - have the family dinner at a different place, or open the gifts at a different time. Create new rituals and family traditions.
3. Don't let a person spend too much time alone. If a person becomes depressed, help is available 24 - hours a day, by calling your local crisis hotline.
4. Remember, many people think of their pets as part of the family, and their loss can be just as painful.

Surviving Divorce

1. After divorce, be sure to let the children know that the holidays will continue, but in a different way. When making plans, be sure to decide ahead of time how the holidays will be divided and remember to include the children in this planning.
2. Make sure you and your children have realistic expectations.
3. Try to get plenty of rest, exercise and eat healthy so you will be better able to cope. Remember, tired children are more easily stressed and likely to be moody.
4. Plan fun activities. If memories are too painful, consider a vacation, or a visit to out-of-state relatives.
5. Take one day at a time. Rely on support from friends and family, and realize that it will get easier with time.

Improving Holiday Spending

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement, glitz and glitter of the holiday season. We are bombarded with advertising that equates the purchasing of goods with success and happiness. These guidelines are intended to provide some common sense tips to making the holidays happy while staying within a budget.

Money Saving Tips

1. Stop or limit your use of credit cards. It's hard to determine how much you've spent until the credit card bills start to arrive.
2. Take advantage of sales and comparison shopping. You could easily save more than 50% on some purchases. If the item you want isn't on sale, ask if it will be going on sale in the near future.
3. Consider a part-time job, especially at stores that offer employee discounts.
4. Gift wrapping can be expensive. Plan ahead and buy next year's paper after the holidays this year for substantial savings.
5. Start in January to save all your change at the end of the day in a jar. Don't use any of it until the holidays.
6. Shop at factory outlet stores or buying clubs that often offer lower prices.
7. Make sure you record all checks, so that none of them are returned because of insufficient funds.
8. Save on postage by sending cards only to those you won't see during the holidays.
9. Watch for special sales later in the season. When holiday spending is sluggish, stores often discount merchandise.

Inexpensive Ways to Celebrate the Holidays



Some of the best ways to create memories are inexpensive. The “little” moments and gifts at holiday times are often the most remembered.

Unique Holiday Gifts/Activities

1. Provide for time with family members and other loved ones. Read stories or poetry together, share fondest holiday memories, bake cookies, etc.
2. Share family history with your children and/or grandchildren, or put together an album of old photographs. These make great gifts and are a good way to pass on family customs and traditions.
3. Give tapes of children singing to grandparents, and have grandparents make tapes of stories of the good old days for the family to share.
4. Have family members make a “personal gift bag.” Everyone decorates a paper bag. Then, each person writes something he/she appreciates or especially likes about every other family member on a piece of paper. Each person also writes down what they will “give” every other person - a gift that cannot be bought - and places it in the appropriate bag. For example, a child might write, “Dad, I really appreciate the fact that you take time to help me with the computer. My gift to you will be at least 15 minutes to relax when you get home.”
5. Share some of your favorite recipes. Write them on pretty cards and give them as gifts, or have a cookie exchange with your friends and/or neighbors.
6. Give family heirlooms as gifts. Make sure the gift will be treasured, but at the same time, be sure you are willing to give up all rights of ownership.

A Low-Fat Holiday

Rich, fattening, holiday eating. Skipped workouts. Stressful shopping. They can add up to extra pounds and low morale, which you deal with for weeks or months after the holidays are over.

Be aware of holiday pitfalls and take positive steps to reduce or avoid them.

Helpful Hints

1. Don't skip meals to save on calories. You'll be so hungry that you'll overeat.
2. Snack on low fat food (fruit and vegetables) before attending parties to avoid overeating rich, fattening foods.
3. Don't keep leftovers around. Send them home in holiday containers with guests.
4. Don't deny yourself all desserts and fun foods. Allow yourself a small sampling of a few special treats, or you'll feel deprived and end up overeating.
5. When eating out, do what you can to cut fat. Avoid sauces, gravies, cheese, mayonnaise, butter and margarine, or ask for them on the side. Choose baked, grilled, roasted, steamed, broiled or poached foods instead of fried.
6. Try to eat fruit and vegetables as much as possible (at least one each meal) to offset desserts and meat/cheese finger food.
7. Eat slowly whenever you can so you'll eat less. Spend your time talking with family and friends instead of eating.
8. Avoid or reduce alcohol consumption. It's fattening and can make you want to eat more.
9. Don't start a diet around the holidays. You'll feel guilty when you can't stick with it and end up eating more.

10. Drink lots of water.

11. Offset tiring shopping and holiday stress with regular exercise and time to relax. If you feel yourself becoming stressed, take time to recharge.

12. When preparing foods for holiday gatherings, use low-fat recipes. They're just as good, nice to look at and your guests will appreciate it, too.

Best Ever Lowfat Chocolate Chip Cookies

2 1/4 c. unsifted all-purpose flour **1 t. baking soda**
6 T. butter, softened **1 t. salt**
3/4 c. granulated sugar **3/4 c. firmly packed brown sugar**
1 c. semi-sweet morsels **1 t. vanilla extract**
5 T. commercial fruit-based fat substitute
1/2 c. refrigerated egg substitute, or 4 large egg whites

Preheat oven to 350°. Lightly coat cookie sheets with nonstick cooking spray. In a small bowl, combine flour, baking soda and salt. In a large bowl, combine butter, fat substitute, sugars and vanilla extract. Beat until creamy. Beat in egg substitute or egg whites. Gradually beat in flour mixture. Stir in chocolate chips. Drop rounded teaspoonsfuls onto cookie sheet. Bake 8-10 minutes, until lightly browned. Serving size - 2 cookies. 75 calories. (fat 1.1 grams unsaturated, 1.3 grams saturated)



Hot or Cold Spiced Cider

4 c. Apple Cider (Pasteurized) **1 stick of Cinnamon**
2 whole cloves **2 Allspice seeds**
1 or 2 pieces of Crystallized Ginger or Dried Fruit
(apricot, plumb, pineapple, etc.) - optional
1 4"x4" piece of Cheese Cloth to make steeping bag



Pour cider into a pot. In the center of the cheese cloth place your spices and fruit. Tie up the four corners of the cheese cloth to make a bag. Place the spice bag into the cider and bring to a boil. Turn off heat and allow to steep until cool enough to drink, or until it reaches room temperature so you can pour it into a container to chill in the fridge.

Beating the Post-Holiday Blues

Once the flurry of holiday activities comes to an end, the friends and family have returned home, and we must resume our daily routine, we may experience post-holiday stress or depression. We feel the loss of increased support we received from family and friends throughout the season. We are no longer caught up in getting a million and one things done, so we need to find things to look forward to in the upcoming winter days. There are things we can do to ward off or cope with these post “holiday hazards.”



Coping After the Holidays

1. Make plans for a weekend trip or special evening outing.
2. Invite friends for dinner or an evening of games.
3. Visit a shut-in or someone in a nursing home -- it will brighten your day and theirs.
4. Invite your spouse/significant other out for a “date” and let him or her choose the activities for the evening.
5. Plan a special activity to do with your children.
6. Spend some time with family members reflecting on the holidays.
7. Start a new activity. Is there something you have always wanted to do but have never gotten around to learning how to do? If so, see if there are any community courses you can enroll in to learn this new skill.
8. The day the holiday decorations are packed away, get fresh flowers for the house. It helps to brighten your home and your spirits.

Again, the possibilities are endless. It is still a matter of attitude and mindset. Make up your mind not to let the post “holiday hazards” get a grip on you and your life.

Best Wishes

The “hazards” of stress and depression that accompany the holidays will probably always be around. However, you do not have to let them ruin your holidays.



In fact, you can make this season's celebration a beautiful, fulfilling experience for yourself and those close to you. Once you know what to guard against, and how to handle matters in a new way, you and your family will be better able to enjoy the holiday season.

The successful mindset for a happy holiday season requires flexibility and a willingness to break out of old patterns to find new, more satisfying ones. Combined with a little planning and the delegating of tasks, you will be on your way.

Best Wishes and Happy Holidays!



Resources

If the stress of this holiday season, or of any other time of year, becomes too much for you or a loved one to handle, feel free to request a “Helping Hand” by contacting the following resources:

The Cuyahoga County Community Mental Health Board's
24 - Hour Mental Health Emergency/Information/Referral
Line for Adults and Children - **(216) 623-6888**

The Lorain County Community Mental Health Board's
24 - Hour Mental Health Emergency/Rape Crisis Hotline
for Adults and Children - **1-800-888-6161**

Credits

“Coping with the Holidays” is a community resource intended to offer you some helpful tips that may reduce stress during the holidays. Its suggestions are not intended to be all inclusive.

“Coping with the Holidays” is provided to you with support by the:



Cuyahoga County Community Mental Health Board
Governmental & Community Affairs Department
(216) 241-3400, ext. 207



Lorain County Board of Mental Health
Public Information Department
(440) 324-2020



Ohio Department of Mental Health
Office of Children's Services and Prevention
(614) 466-2596



WCPN 90.3FM Cleveland Public Radio
Community Relations Department
(216) 432-3700, ext. 221
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