



GIVING YOURSELF THE GIFT OF GOOD HEALTH
THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

Meritus Health | Behavioral Health Services

Stress Strategies for the Holidays



The holidays—a time of festivity, parties, shopping, entertaining, religious observances, family gatherings, decorating and...stress! With all the extra demands we place on ourselves and expectations of the season, is it any wonder that most of us feel some stress during the holiday? The source of holiday stress is simple: when it comes to time, money and social and family commitments, most people try to do too much. Here are some strategies for making your holidays a time of renewal.

Set Priorities

People tend to overextend themselves during the holidays. It's not necessary to attend every party and religious celebration that comes along. When rationing your limited time, choose quality over quantity. Decide what activities you and your family would most enjoy doing and focus on those. Share responsibilities for cooking and baking with others. Learn to say "no" gently but firmly to social events that are over your limit.

Plan Ahead

Nothing creates more holiday stress than last-minute shopping and preparations. Take charge of your holidays in advance by making lists of things to do and setting aside some time each day for them. Consider setting a cutoff date; after that date things that are not done will be deferred until next year.

Keep It Simple

A holiday feast doesn't have to be elaborate to be wonderful. Often traditional fare is appreciated most, with guests providing some of the dishes. When shopping, take advantage of gift-wrapping services. Try shopping at home on-line or from catalogues. Let someone else compete for the "most fabulous holiday preparations" award.

Stay in Budget

Do holiday preparations strain your budget? Learn to say no to expensive holiday ideas. Choose simple, thoughtful or useful gifts over elaborate, expensive surprises. How can you enjoy the holidays if you are worried about paying your bills?

Riding the Emotional Roller Coaster

The holidays are hard on our emotions. The holidays of our childhood take on a magical glow that is often impossible to recover in adulthood. While the radios and department stores are blaring messages of peace and joy, you are dreading the family gathering that always leads to someone not speaking to someone else. If family gatherings are stressful, avoid long visits, either in your house or away. Defer setting family arguments until some other time. Be willing to let go of old traditions if they no longer work for your family, and find new ones that do.

Take Care of Yourself

Counter the holiday pressures by giving yourself some time for rest and renewal each day. Avoid overindulgence in holiday food, alcohol and caffeine. Think about what the holidays are actually celebrating and try to stay true to that spirit. Peace and joy can be more than just a department store come-on.



Keeping your Holiday Spending Out of the **Red**

'Tis the season to shop!

As the winter holiday approaches we are tempted by creative advertising to buy the “perfect” gifts for friends and family. In January we are faced with the bills. Following some simple budgeting tips can prevent you from starting the New Year with expenses left over from last year.

- 1.** Set a realistic budget and plan to stick to it- List the names of those you want to purchase gifts for and set a limit for each. Be determined to stay within the limit. Include hidden costs in your budget including the cost of shopping (gas, parking) decorations, greeting cards, postage, travel expenses, holiday related apparel and charitable contributions.
- 2.** Review your gift giving list-Look at your list and see if there is anyone you can eliminate this year. For example, that old school friend that you don't see often.
- 3.** Decide what you plan to buy for each person on the list. Use the internet to comparison shop for the best price. Look for coupons and store discounts that can also help you save.
- 4.** Leave the credit cards at home- Bring only the cash with you that you have set aside for holiday shopping. This makes it difficult to overspend or impulse shop.
- 5.** Consider adopting a Kids-Only holiday for your family-Get together with all of the adults and talk about just buying presents for the kids this year. To cut costs and reduce the stress of holiday shopping, consider taking it further by doing a name-exchange.
- 6.** Opt out of the office gift exchange-Propose a day of service instead or a shared office meal to celebrate. Use the experience as an office team building exercise.
- 7.** Beware of making emotional purchases-If you're feeling stressed you tend to spend more and buy impulsively. Don't get caught up in the hype of Black Friday sales.
- 8.** Shop Early-Start shopping as soon as your list is complete. Resist the temptation to wait for last minute sales. You are likely to buy more and purchase additional items that you don't need if you wait till closer to the holiday.
- 9.** Do It Yourself Gifts- Look for readily available ideas on homemade gifts. Baked goods or simple crafts or photographs are often the most appreciated gifts and certainly very affordable.
- 10.** Set Reasonable Expectations with family, especially with children-If finances are tight this year explain that to the kids ahead of time to reduce disappointment. Empower them to make choices that are within the family budget. Consider a simple \$10.00 gift exchange or exchanging names of favorite charities and making a donation in someone's name.

Making the Most of Family Relationships



During the Holidays

Preplanning can help you readjust, handle the unexpected, avoid misunderstandings and hurt feelings. So you can have the best holiday you can possible. Here are a few ways to cope with different, potentially upsetting, scenarios.

1. **Set Realistic Expectations** – Accept people for who they are to avoid a confrontation that will make you both feel miserable. Tell yourself that “perfect” isn’t necessary.
2. **Dealing with Difficult Family Members** - Almost every family has at least one relative who is best avoided. If you think a problem might arise, try to work it out beforehand. Call to say, “I don’t want to ruin our celebration. Let’s agree not to discuss this during the time we are together. Let’s put this behind us, it is not important enough to ruin the day.”
3. **Designate a Rescuer.** Tell someone if they see you cornered to come rescue you. Interference will get you out of a confrontation with a relative. “We need help with the food” or “Can you bring more toilet paper for the bathroom.”
4. **Plan Seating Arrangements** - If you foresee trouble or if one person will be uncomfortable or unhappy seated next to the other.
5. **Invite Friends** – to dilute difficult family members. Friends are an important part of our support system and can be helpful to diffuse tension.
6. **Plan Fun Activities** – That include both adults and kids; walking outside or an active outdoors game, a calmer board game, or trivia game that includes the kids.
7. **Be Thankful.** Take a few moments to be grateful. Go around the table giving everyone an opportunity to share what they are thankful for.

Holiday Blues



How to Survive the Holidays

Has the holiday season arrived without you? Since we can't control the season's arrival, it's not unusual for adults to feel out-of-synch with the holiday crowd. These tips might help you pick up your spirits and see you through.

START NEW TRADITIONS

Since the carrying on of "tradition" is one of the hallmarks of the holidays, you might feel most acutely sad if it's not possible to carry out some of your usual traditions. If you've recently lost a loved one, if the holiday season is the anniversary of such a loss, or if your living situation has changed in the past year and you are away from loved ones, remember that you can start new traditions. They may not seem like much at first, but if you are able to repeat them over the next few years, they'll begin to feel comfortable.



PARTICIPATE WHEN YOU CAN

If you're feeling blue, it's difficult to have much enthusiasm for social expectations such as gift-giving or party-going. Participate at a level that feels comfortable to you, but try not to isolate yourself entirely. A little participation might pick up your spirits.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Holiday media messages can be overwhelming at the height of the season. This might be a good time to spend evenings with a good book or quiet music instead of watching television. Write letters to friends and loved ones instead of sending cards. By staying involved in some activity you might find your mood lifting a little.



VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

There are many social service programs for people in need over the holidays. Taking time to participate, if only for a few hours, can be a good way out of the holiday doldrums and help bring the season's greetings to others.

TALK THINGS OUT

Many adults experience holiday blues. If you're not able to compensate for it in some other way, or feel that the "blues" might be drifting into depression, get professional help through your physician or your community mental health agency.