



# DON'T LET YOUR HOLIDAY SEASON GET OUT OF CONTROL

Meritus Behavioral Health Services  
Employee Assistance Program

# What Kind of Holiday Do You Want?

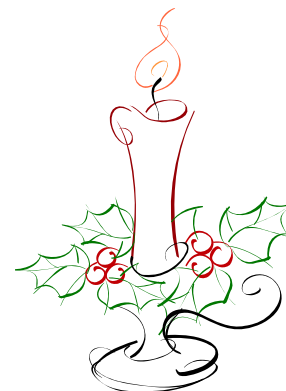
Sit down with your partner and/or family, and have a heart-to-heart talk about what each of you expect from the holidays. Talk about holidays past. Discuss what activities you would like to do the same and those you would like to do differently this year.

Have each family member assign a number from 1 to 10 to each of the items listed below.

Your Rating: 1 = Not important to me  
10 = Very important to me

## The holidays are...

- A chance to enjoy spending quality time with my immediate family.
- A time to create special meals.
- A time to create a beautiful home environment.
- A time to celebrate my spiritual beliefs.
- A time for shopping and exchanging gifts.
- A time for parties, entertaining and visits with friends.
- A time to help those who are less fortunate.
- A time to strengthen bonds with my relatives.
- A time for rest, solitude, revitalization and introspection.
- A time for special recreational activities.
- A time to stay at home.
- A time to travel.



## 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.



## 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.



The holidays can wipe you out as much as asking the boss for a raise. Paying the bills on all your holiday gifts might make you feel like you are standing on the bridge, asking yourself, "Is this, such a wonderful life?" Just remember there is plenty of hope. Six out of every ten people do enjoy this time of year.

## You Don't have to Be A Scrooge to Sing the Holiday Blues



### WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SURVIVE?

- First**, recognize the signs of stress, when everything is just "too much." Too much disappointment, unresolved goals, painful memories, arguing, fighting, family feuds, longing, worrying, spending, eating, drinking, insomnia, and frayed nerves.
- Second**, don't panic when you face the fact that you've got the blues, go back to basics. What is this season really about? Religions tell stories of hardship and poverty leading to hope, generosity, courage and belief. Even if you aren't religious, find a meaning that answers your personal needs and brings you closer to others.
- Third**, take good care of yourself, so you can take care of others.

Here's a clever way to remind you how to survive the holiday season:

### BE NATURAL

- B** **Breathe** deeply; it will help increase energy levels.
- E** **Exercise** 20 minutes, three times a week, running from errand to errand doesn't count.
- N** **Nutrition:** Eat three well-balanced meals each day.
- A** **Attitude:** Negative attitudes are contagious and destructive. Try to see the glass half full.
- T** **Time management:** Set priorities and don't take on more than you can handle.
- U** **Uniqueness:** Recognize and treasure your own uniqueness. Say "no" when necessary.
- R** **Relaxation:** Private time to read or listen to music – a time not to focus on the next item to do.
- A** **Associations:** maintain contact with nurturing support systems – colleagues, friends, and family
- L** **Laughter:** Still the best medicine.



Parents~ here's a reminder for guiding your kids. Kids might find this "mushy and yucky," But you can teach your children about the spirit of the season by placing a value on:

### KISS

- K** **Kindness:** Find ways to give to others in need and do it as a family activity.
- I** **Importance:** Let your kids know each day in some special way how much they mean to you.
- S** **Safety:** Make sure your kids are supervised during the winter break and keep them occupied by finding one family project to do that's fun and constructive.
- S** **Simplicity:** Sometimes giving one big gift to each child is all that's necessary and the best gift is always your love. Be grateful you have each other.

# Holiday Hangover Cure



## TAKE YOUR VITAMINS!

Shorter days cause us to have less sunlight exposure which can cause vitamin D levels in the body to drop. Consider a boost with a vitamin D supplement. Melatonin levels can also drop leading to or supporting Seasonal Affective Disorder. Talk with your doctor about the best supplement for you.



## GET MOVING!

Freezing cold temperatures often provide a great excuse not to exercise right? Wrong! Think about trying a winter activity like skiing, ice skating or sledding. You might like it! Even hiking in the winter provides a completely different view of plants and animals that are surviving in spite of the cold temperatures!



## GET LIGHT THERAPY!

Make an effort to take a short walk outside or sit by a window during the day. If you work in an area with no natural light you might want try light box therapy.



## TREAT YOURSELF!

It may be months before your next vacation day. Plan a mini holiday or special outing with a friend or loved one or just by yourself for some alone time. Have a spa day that includes a massage which has been shown to decrease depression and improve mood.



## CONSIDER AROMATHERAPY!

Lavender has been shown to help with both sleep and depressive symptoms. Jasmine has also showed some benefit with SAD. Add these scents to your bath water, diffuser or aroma lamp.



## INDULGE IN CHOCOLATE!

Dark chocolate has been shown to boost dopamine levels in the brain. It also has some anti-inflammatory properties that can be good for your health. If you are trying to cut calories buy the dark chocolate kisses for a quick pick me up without blowing your diet.



## HYDRATE!

We often don't drink enough water when it's cold outside. However, the cold weather wreaks havoc with our skin and nails. This can cause cracking and open areas that can lead to infection. Try to get the recommended 64 oz. a day.