

HANDLING HOLIDAY STRESS
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Does the holiday red and green leave you feeling blue? Overwhelmed by the demands of seasonal celebrations? Dreading the temptation to over-indulge in alcohol, food, and spending sprees?

This time of year is often stressful for many people, whether or not they celebrate Christmas. At work we face end-of-year deadlines, as the winter storm season rolls in. Shorter daylight hours lead to heavier commute traffic as well as fewer opportunities for outdoor exercise, and may trigger feelings of fatigue or depression.

Mass media and retailers exhort us to “get into the spirit” by buying things we don’t need, and spending money we don’t have. We may feel pressured to spend time with relatives whose company we don’t enjoy; we might miss being with loved ones who are far away or who have died. Or we can simply stress ourselves out by trying to make the holiday experience “perfect” for everyone!

Here are some Tips to Prevent the “Holiday Blues”:

1. **Be realistic.** Don’t expect people to change, or problems to go away, just because the holidays are here.
2. Think about what the holiday season means to you. If possible, have a family discussion to find out **what gives the holidays meaning**, and what’s important, for each person.
3. **Find a balance** between those things which will make you feel good, and those which you may still feel obligated to do.
4. **Prioritize and plan ahead** to insure that the essential things get done. Break down big projects into smaller steps that can be done 15 minutes at a time.
5. **Be creative, and have fun!** Your best holiday memories probably involve things that didn’t cost a lot of money, and may have happened spontaneously.
6. **Focus on what you can control**, and allow others to take responsibility for getting their own needs met.
7. **Ask for what you want**, whether it’s a special gift, or help in getting tasks done. Don’t expect others to read your mind or anticipate your needs.
8. **Don’t overspend.** Set a realistic budget for gifts as well as holiday decorations and entertaining; and stick to it.
9. **Shop early** – lines are shorter, the selection is greater, and there is less pressure for last minute spending.
10. Take care of your emotions: **allow yourself to feel your feelings.** If you’re missing someone or something that was present at previous holidays, you may need to take time to mourn your loss.
11. **Take care of yourself physically:** make sure you get enough rest, fresh air and exercise; consume alcohol and sweets in moderation.
12. And above all: **Keep a sense of humor!**

If you’ve tried these steps and find that you’re still unable to shake the holiday blues, there may be a medical or psychological cause. You should consult your physician, and consider seeking help from a mental health professional as well.