

Tips for navigating stress around the holidays



The holidays are a wonderful time for giving, spending time with loved ones and expressing our gratitude. However, for many, the holidays can also be filled with stress, grief or other negative feelings. This, of course, is perfectly normal. Life is always full of highs and lows, and the holiday season is no exception.

The best way to approach the stress that the holidays can bring is to better understand what might trigger these feelings and how you can address them if they do come up. Below, we cover some common holiday stressors and how to cope.



Missing family

With the COVID-19 pandemic, many families are entering what could be their second holiday season without the ability to gather in person. Others may be wondering how to celebrate the holiday season after losing a loved one, or some of us may be estranged from our families. Grief and loss are normal emotions to feel during the holidays when we are remembering loved ones who can't be with us or those we have lost over the years.

Tip: If you're feeling grief or sadness around the holidays, try sharing your feelings with a trusted friend, family member or licensed therapist. Talking through feelings can often be a good way to cope, even when we know the feelings of loss may never go away completely. Meditation and journaling can help too.



Too much family time

Some of us will be lucky to spend time with family this holiday season, but that doesn't mean it will be a stress-free experience. Too much family time can bring its own unique kind of stress.

Tip: Practice some deep breathing techniques before you gather with family. As simple as this sounds, pausing to take a deep breath could mean the difference between brushing off a potential conflict and reacting in a way that you might regret later. If you're feeling uncomfortable or sense a conflict may come up, have an exit plan. Check in with yourself throughout the gathering by doing a quick body scan to see if you're holding any tension in your chest, neck or jaw. Feel free to go for a walk, leave the room or call it a night at any time. Sometimes, just knowing you have an exit plan can help you feel more relaxed.



Financial worries

Giving and receiving gifts is a common holiday tradition for many, but one that can also be a big source of stress and worry. Taking on holiday debt can cause stress long after the season is over. Thankfully, a little financial planning ahead can go a long way.

Tip: Set a holiday gift budget and stick to it. If you're exchanging gifts with friends or family, agree on a price limit that is within everyone's budget. Remember that homemade gifts are some of the most memorable gifts and can be done well on a budget. Finally, never underestimate the value of a heartfelt note or card.



Holiday indulging

Especially for those who are managing weight, diabetes or a heart condition, stress around holiday meals and the temptation to overindulge can be an unwelcome part of the holidays. Wanting to stay on track with your goals while enjoying favorite festive treats, traditions and social gatherings can feel tricky, but it's possible!

Tip: If you can, talk to your doctor, health coach or dietitian before the holidays begin to make a plan that works for your needs. Keep snacks on hand so healthy choices are easier to make. Finally, plan ahead for your splurge meals. Perhaps you decide to indulge in dessert on Thanksgiving but skip the alcohol. Then, leave the leftovers for someone else to eat, so you can get back on track the next day. The most important thing is to let go of all-or-nothing thinking around healthy eating—every day is a new day to move closer to your goals.

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