



Cheer

Give yourself the gift of happier holidays

For many people, the holiday season is a time for good cheer, shopping and family gatherings. For others, the holidays can be a hard time. Many people feel more stress, disappointment, guilt and sadness this time of year.

Do any of these statements sound like you?

- All your free time leading up to the holidays is booked with errands and shopping.
- You spend more than you budgeted on gifts and holiday items.
- You said “yes” to too many parties and events.
- You won’t get a full night’s sleep until after January 1.
- You end up doing most of the work for family gatherings.
- You honestly can’t wait until the holidays are over.

If any of these are true for you, you can do something about it. You can control how much you choose to do or not do. You can make changes in the ways you celebrate the holidays.

Tips for a happier holiday

- **Be reasonable.** Don't expect perfection.
- **Give yourself and others a break.** Don't get upset if things don't go as planned.
- **Enjoy the magical time of the year.** But don't expect it to solve your personal or family problems.
- **Manage your time.** Let others know what you can and can't do. Don't say "yes" when you really mean "no."
- **Make a master to-do list.** Write down everything you need to buy, make, bake or send. Now work on cutting down the list. What can you leave out?
- **Take care of yourself.** Watch what you eat and drink. Get enough sleep and make time for exercise.
- **Shop within your budget.** Worrying about money adds to the stress of the holiday season.
- **Give some of your holiday tasks to other family members.**
- **Carefully choose the events you want to attend.** Celebrate with people whose company lifts your spirits. Focus on the true meaning of the holidays for you.

- **Welcome each moment along the way and not just the "special day."** For example, have fun with decorating the house, baking cookies, gift-wrapping, etc.
- **If you're away from family and friends, or have experienced the loss of a loved one, share your feelings of grief.** Keep the demands on your time, energy and wallet to a minimum. It's okay to pass on an activity if you're not feeling up to it.

We can help you stress less through the holiday season. Setting healthy limits is key to keeping the holidays a favorite time of the year.



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Don't let stress ruin your holiday spirit

Here we are, right in the middle of holiday season. Are you feeling cool, calm and collected or is your stress level going up?

If you're feeling relaxed and happy, kudos to you! For most people, however, stress can be at an all-time high during the holidays. So if all the cooking, shopping, sending cards and decorating have you frazzled, you're not alone.

Make a decision to turn down the stress

Even though we're still in the midst of the holidays, you have control over what you do—and don't do—right now and for the next few weeks. It's not too late to make changes that may help you feel better.

Need a little mid-holiday tune-up? Consider these ideas:

- **Cut back on spending...now.** One of the worst things we do to ourselves is to overspend during the holidays. It's not too late to re-examine your upcoming expenses and cut back where you can.

- **Be mindful of the “holiday five.”** Many of us put on five pounds or more this time of year. Why? Partying and food are central themes for the holidays. If you already feel your clothes getting tight, you might consider steps like these:

- Don't starve yourself all day to get ready for a party. Eat normal or light meals so you arrive hungry but not ravenous.
- If there's a buffet, go through it only once and then turn your back on it so you're not tempted.
- Be picky about what you eat. There are lots of yummy, high-calorie treats. Ask your host to point you to the healthiest options.

- **Check your mood-o-meter.** Feeling tired or cranky? Many normal routines get interrupted during the holidays. Plus your workload may seem bigger than ever when added to holiday activities. These things can have a big impact on your mood and energy.

Some people also feel sad because the holidays may not be perfect.

The solution? Look out for you right now

Push away stress by taking better care of yourself starting today.

- **Try to get 6-8 hours of sleep every night.** Holiday time or not, we all need sleep to feel good.
- **Maintain your exercise routine.** Exercise is a natural stress reliever. Think of exercise as an appointment you need to keep — not an optional activity. Do something every day whether it's a walk or a workout.
- **Respect your right to say no.** You don't need to attend every party, eat every treat or drink too much. Do things that make you comfortable and happy.
- **Be real about your feelings.** No one is upbeat all the time — and that includes during holiday season. If you feel down about relationship issues, money, missing loved ones or anything else, talk to a friend, spiritual leader or mental health professional.

Sure, it's holiday time.
Still, real life goes on.
Remember to keep your
work, personal and holiday
expectations realistic.
You'll feel better physically,
mentally and emotionally.



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Talk it out

Communication during the holidays

The holiday rush can create a lot of stress for many families. It can also lead to poor communication between family members. It can be hard to talk when everyone is around. And if you do talk, you might find it hard to listen to each other. Maybe you're too busy thinking about things that are needed for the holidays.

This holiday season try to practice effective listening and expression.

Effective listening

Here's how you can be an effective listener:

- **Focus:** Pay attention to what someone is saying. Try your best not to think about other things when a family member is talking to you.
- **Be patient:** Accept and have respect for what the other person is sharing. You're not truly listening if you're being judgmental or defensive. Have an open mind and hear the other person out.
- **Rephrase:** This is a way to check your understanding of what's being said to you. You can say things like, "Do you mean..." and then rephrase the message in your own words. You can say something like "Did I get that right?" at the end.
- **Be sensitive:** Pay attention to the feelings being shared, as well as the words said. This means being sensitive to what's not being said while talking. It's important to be sensitive to the way family members feel.

Effective expression

Good communication includes expressing yourself as well as listening. To express your thoughts and feelings, you need to listen to yourself first. Ask yourself:

- “What am I really feeling right now?”
- “What do I really think about this issue?”
- “How can I best get my point across?”

Try using I-statements instead of you-statements. You might say, “I’d like to spend this holiday at home with you and the kids this year. I don’t want to travel this year.” This message is better than a you-statement like “You always want to spend the holidays with your family.”

The you-statement can seem like an attack and the listener may become defensive. I-statements are more likely to keep communication open.

Find more time to talk. Even during the holiday rush, you can talk while driving, doing chores or wrapping gifts.

Call us when you need help finding the right words. We’re here for you any day, any time.



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For you

Handling loneliness during the holidays

'Tis the season to be jolly...or is it?

Being sad or lonely during the season of good cheer can make you feel isolated. Yet it's true that the holidays can stir up tough emotions.

Maybe you've just lost a loved one or ended a relationship. Maybe you've just changed jobs or moved to a new area — leaving friends behind. If you're lonely or sad, don't try to ignore your feelings. Try taking steps to cope.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Be realistic.** Identify your feelings. You have to know that you may feel down in the weeks ahead. This will help you avoid getting caught off guard.

It can also help to stay away from holiday events that may cause you to feel worse. If you want to avoid the traditional events, start your own holiday tradition.

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Remember: You get to write the script for yourself. Don't let old traditions control what you do.

- **Be gentle with yourself.** Don't try to be superhuman. If you start to feel sad, let yourself be and feel those emotions. Then try to get busy. A new project, book or other activity can help ease your heart.
- **De-stress.** What do you like to do to manage stress? Do things that feel safe and stress-free. Avoid overuse of alcohol and other substances to soothe yourself. They can make you feel depressed.
- **Ask for support and take it.** When someone offers help — whether it's a shoulder to cry on or a quiet dinner together — take it. It's important to lean on your support system.
- **Enjoy the moment.** Even if you're feeling down, you can still have some fun too. Open up and enjoy what you can.
- **Volunteer.** Give some time at a soup kitchen, animal shelter or senior center. Helping others can make you feel better — and it'll feel good spending time with others.
- **Let go of expectations.** It's okay if you don't feel like decorating nicely this year. Give yourself a break. If you don't want to track down gifts for everyone, buy gift cards instead. People who know and care about you will understand.
- **Get professional support.** Support from a mental health expert during the holidays is a great idea. And if sad or lonely feelings stay beyond the holidays, seek help. Skilled professionals can help you deal with the pain of depression, anxiety and any other troubling feelings you have. Reach out.

The holiday season will pass.
Don't beat yourself up about
avoiding the hype this year. Let's
help you through this season.
Call us anytime.



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