



Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

1. **Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
2. **Reach out.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
3. **Be realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos.
4. **Set aside differences.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
5. **Stick to a budget.** Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Try these alternatives: Donate to a charity in someone's name, give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.
6. **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for party prep and cleanup.
7. **Learn to say no.** Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
8. **Don't abandon healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity.
9. **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Listen to soothing music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

10. **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Take control of the holidays

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays!!!!



Stress relievers: Top 10 picks to tame stress

Top 10 stress relievers

1. Get active

Virtually any form of exercise and physical activity can act as a stress reliever. Even if you're not an athlete or you're out of shape, exercise is still a good stress reliever. Physical activity pumps up your feel-good endorphins and refocuses your mind on your body's movements; improving your mood and helping

the day's irritations fade away. Consider walking, jogging, gardening, house cleaning, biking, swimming, weightlifting or anything else that gets you active.

2. Meditate

During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. Meditation instills a sense of calm, peace and balance that benefits both your emotional well-being and your overall health. Guided meditation, guided imagery, visualization and other forms of meditation can be practiced anywhere at any time, whether you're out for a walk, riding the bus to work or waiting at the doctor's office.

3. Laugh

A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but it can help you feel better, even if you have to force a fake laugh through your grumpiness. When you start to laugh, it lightens your mental load and actually causes positive physical changes in your body. Laughter fires up and then cools down your stress response and increases your heart rate and blood pressure, producing a good, relaxed feeling. So read some jokes, tell some jokes, watch a comedy or hang out with your funny friends.

4. Connect

When you're stressed and irritable, your instinct may be to wrap yourself in a cocoon. Instead, reach out to family and friends and make social connections. Social contact is a good stress reliever because it can distract you, provide support, help you weather life's up and downs, and make you feel good by doing good. So take a coffee break with a friend, email a relative, volunteer for a charitable group, or visit your place of worship.

5. Assert yourself

You might want to do it all, but you probably can't, at least not without paying a price. Learn to say no to some tasks or to delegate them. Saying yes may seem like an easy way to keep the peace, prevent conflicts and get the job done right. But it may actually cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family come second, which can lead to stress, anger, resentment and even the desire to exact revenge. And that's not very calm and peaceful.

6. Do yoga

With its series of postures and controlled-breathing exercises, yoga is a popular stress reliever. Yoga brings together physical and mental disciplines to achieve peacefulness of body and mind, helping you relax and manage stress and anxiety. Try yoga on your own or find a class — you can find classes in

most communities. Hatha yoga, in particular, is a good stress reliever because of its slower pace and easier movements.

7. Sleep

Stress often gives sleep the heave-ho. You have too much to do — and too much to think about — and your sleep suffers. But sleep is the time when your brain and body recharge. And the quality and amount of sleep you get affects your mood, energy level, concentration and overall functioning. If you have sleep troubles, make sure that you have a quiet, relaxing bedtime routine, listen to soothing music, put clocks away, and stick to a consistent schedule.

8. Journal

Writing out thoughts and feelings can be a good release for otherwise pent-up emotions. Don't think about what to write — just let it happen. Write whatever comes to mind. No one else needs to read it, so don't strive for perfection in grammar or spelling. Just let your thoughts flow on paper — or computer screen. Once you're done, you can toss out what you wrote or save it to reflect on later.

9. Get musical

Listening to or playing music is a good stress reliever because it provides a mental distraction, reduces muscle tension and decreases stress hormones. Crank up the volume and let your mind be absorbed by the music. If music isn't your thing, though, turn your attention to another hobby you enjoy, such as gardening, sewing, sketching — anything that requires you to focus on what you're doing rather than what you think you should be doing.

10. Seek counsel

If new stressors are challenging your ability to cope or if self-care stress relievers just aren't relieving your stress, you may need to look for reinforcements in the form of professional therapy or counseling. Therapy may be a good idea if stress leaves you feeling overwhelmed or trapped, if you worry excessively, or if you have trouble carrying out daily routines or meeting responsibilities at work, home or school. Professional counselors or therapists can help you identify sources of your stress and learn new coping tools.