

Reducing holiday stress

The holidays are a wonderful time of year. But it can also be a time when we feel the most pressured: there are expectations about family togetherness, too many choices about how to spend your time, and concerns about spending too much money. Here are some tips to help you survive the holidays... and maybe even enjoy them:

Edit your life. You may need to be more assertive and say “no” to events that really don’t add any meaning to the holiday season for you personally.

Clarify family expectations. This may mean not giving a gift to every grown family member and rotating who will give a gift each year.

Lower your financial burden. Budget your spending and stick to it. Take all the credit cards in your family and freeze them in a block of ice and put them in the freezer during the holiday season. If you can get through the holidays without major debt afterwards, you can enjoy the season without the guilt.

Get organized ahead of time. Get your gift wrapping and other chores done before the last minute. Then give yourself the gift of relaxation rather than stress!

Give to others. Often we become so wrapped up in all the activities of the season, we forget to take the time to give to others outside the family – to those who really do experience need. Consider inviting an elderly widow or widower in your neighbourhood into your home for cocoa and cookies, “adopt” someone for the holidays who is either away from family or has no family, serve a meal at a local soup kitchen, or visit with some elderly folks at a nursing home and bring along some small gifts. These small acts will help bring perspective to our lives and enrich us.

Remember that it’s the thought that counts. Don’t let competitiveness and perfectionism send you on too many shopping trips. Homemade or thoughtful, inexpensive gifts from the heart are often cherished far more than high-priced items.

Take short relaxation breaks. If you find yourself trying to sustain a fast pace, be sure to take some “down time,” even if it is just taking a few minutes out to take a few deep breaths and consciously breathe away tension.

Make a list. Write down everything you’d like to do this holiday season, prioritize in order to get the most amount of joy from the limited amount of time you have to spend with family, friends, and coworkers. Remember, this year’s priorities may look different than those of past holidays.

Take care of yourself. For most people, the holidays go hand-in-hand with too much sugar, fat, caffeine, and alcohol and not nearly enough exercise and sleep. One of the best ways to combat stress is to pay attention to your body’s need for healthy food, exercise, and sleep during this intense time of year.

Take time to laugh. If you get too stressed, take a laughter break and rent a funny holiday comedy. Laughter is the best medicine – watching other families fumble their way through the holiday season can be entertaining and stress-releasing!

Create a new holiday tradition. Take a fresh look at your various holiday activities. You may discover one or more traditions are in need of an overhaul, or you may consider creating a new tradition. Keep in mind that the best traditions are often those that are the simplest and involve spending quality time together.



Make a change!



With the holiday season fast approaching, make a commitment to yourself to find a deeper satisfaction in the holiday experience. Don't just do things because you can do them and fit them into your schedule. Rather, consider if the event or activity fits in with your values and the meaning of the season. Remember, life is really about the journey. **Savour the moments – allow yourself enough time to celebrate each activity before rushing on to the next event.**

Don't let the hustle and bustle of the season steal away opportunities to be thankful for the people, experiences, and events (both good and bad) that will make this year unique and memorable. If you are sending greeting cards, why not add a personalized message about why you are thankful for having the recipient in your life. Consider getting involved with a volunteer activity where you can help others. Few activities result in greater satisfaction than the act of giving selflessly from the heart. Last, but not least, commit to taking some time to reflect on the deeper meaning and spirit of the holidays for you personally, for your family, and for humanity and the world.

By pausing to reflect on this meaning, you can gain a better perspective on how to organize your holiday plans and even your plans for the coming year.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the thought of the upcoming holiday stress, consider taking some time out to complete one of Human Solutions e-courses. Three possibilities are *Managing Stress*, *Optimistic Thinking*, and *Resilience*. If you feeling depressed and out of sorts about the holidays, you might want to get some professional help and call Human Solutions at the numbers below.



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