

## Understanding Holiday Stress



The winter holiday season, with celebrations such as Christmas, Hanukkah, and Thanksgiving, for most people is a fun time of the year filled with parties and social gatherings with family and friends. But for many people, it is a time filled with sadness, self-reflection, loneliness, and anxiety.

Here are the **Top 11** things that Americans dread about Holidays, according to a survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center:

- 68%:** Crowds and long lines
- 37%:** Gaining weight
- 37%:** Getting into debt
- 28%:** Gift shopping
- 25%:** Traveling
- 24%:** Seeing certain relatives
- 23%:** Seasonal music
- 19%:** Disappointing gifts
- 16%:** Having to attend holiday parties or events
- 15%:** Having to be nice
- 12%:** Holiday tipping

With holiday family reunions looming in your calendar, what are some ways that you can prepare yourself and cope better this season? We turned to the experts for some tips on beating holiday stress and anxiety.

- Holiday stress has a particular impact on women, who take charge of many of the holiday celebrations, particularly the tasks related to preparing meals and decorating the home.

## WHAT CAUSES HOLIDAY STRESS?



- Unhappy memories.
- Toxic relatives
- What's changed
- What's stayed the same
- Lowered defenses

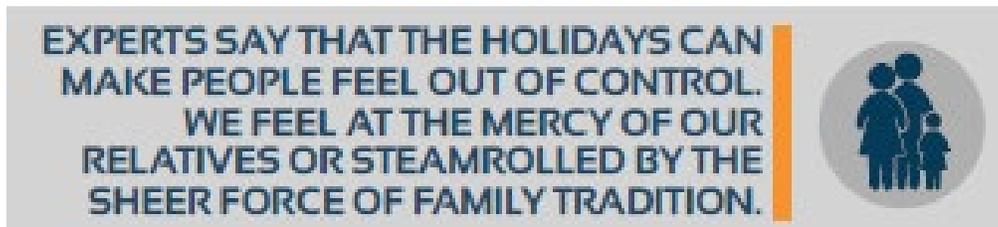
- Women are more likely than men to report an increase of stress during the holiday season. In addition, they have a harder time relaxing during the holidays and are more likely to fall into bad habits to manage their stress, like comfort eating.
- Holiday stress has an impact on lower middle-income individuals. This group feels the weight of stress from work plus the seasonal rush to find time to get everything done. In addition, their worries about money are heightened by the commercialism of the season and the pressure to spend a lot of money.
- People in the United States are more likely to feel their stress increases rather than decreases during the holidays. The holidays can be a hectic time for many, and a lack of money, a lack of time, and the hype and commercialism of the season causes increased stress for people in this country.



- During the holidays, stress takes on a different character than at other times of the year. Men and women alike feel a duty to make the holidays the best they can for their families. At the same time, commercialism and hype run rampant during the holidays as the shops and the advertising pressure us to buy more and more expensive gifts during this, their prime shopping season. The challenge becomes

whether the family will have enough money and time to execute the perfect holiday without running up credit card debt.

- Workplace stress does not disappear. Although time off work is an important highlight of the holidays, people worry about getting enough time off of work and that work responsibilities might interfere with time spent with the family.
- During the holidays people in the United States are much more likely to say they behave in sedentary ways like watching TV, sleeping, eating and drinking to manage their stress. Many individuals engage in comfort eating and other unhealthy behaviors to cope with their stress levels.



- Women are particularly vulnerable to increased stress around the holiday season. It is women who shoulder the majority of the family burden for shopping and holiday celebrations and they feel particular stress from the time crunch required to get everything done.
- On Thanksgiving, many people in the United States sit down with family to have the traditional Thanksgiving meal. However, women are nearly twice as likely as men to say they will do the work necessary to pull off the multi-course turkey dinner: shopping for food, cooking, and cleaning dirty dishes.
- Lower middle-income people in the United States feel a financial crunch around the holidays. The struggle to afford and to purchase material goods is particularly acute for this group. Lower middle-income individuals feel the pressure of commercialism and hype during the holidays, as well as the financial worries of being able to afford the holidays without running up credit card debt.



- The leading holiday stressors are time (67 percent often or sometimes), money (62 percent often or sometimes), and commercialism or hype (53 percent often or sometimes). In contrast, work and money are leading stressors during the regular year.

### **Holiday Stress – Tisn't The Season To Be Stressed Out**



Feeling a little stressed during the holiday season? Like many we tend to let our worry, expectations, poor planning, and over-indulgence get in the way of truly enjoying the holidays.

‘The first step to a ‘stress-less’ holiday is to determine your most important goal for the season,’ explains stress and wellness expert, Beverly Beuermann-King, who delivers stress workshops to companies across the country.

Stop, relax and start doing some planning. Relinquish those activities that have lost meaning or complicate your life. Get back to the basics and simplify.

Spending weeks or months finding the perfect gift for that special someone can be a waste of time. ‘There is no such thing as the perfect gift,’ says Beuermann-King. ‘Bring back the meaning of the holidays by simply showing people you appreciate them. Ask for suggestions. It doesn’t have to be the most unique or expensive gift to make a lasting impression.’

As you are out and about this holiday season and anxiety starts to build as you’re waiting in the long line-ups in the stores, try deep breathing to calm yourself down, Beuermann-King suggests.

‘Plan ahead for this wait time,’ continues Beuermann-King. ‘Catch up on some reading or organize your remaining tasks.’

Don't be afraid to alter tradition. 'Try simplifying things,' suggests Beuermann-King. 'Instead of a 15-course meal with you doing six hours of dishes, try using paper plates or asking your guests to bring a dish.'

'Tradition says we should spend time with our families, but if you don't like your family you shouldn't be spending time with them during the holidays,' said Beuermann-King. 'Find traditions that add purpose to your life and get rid of those that don't.'

Most of all, make sure to take care of yourself by resting well, eating a balanced diet and spending time with the people who make you happy.

***The holidays are, first and foremost, a joyful time.***

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