

Wellness During the Holiday Season

For most of us, the holiday season can be a fun and exciting time. But it can also be stressful, and overwhelming — especially when we're trying to do a lot in a short period of time. Many of us feel stress in December because we're unrealistic about how much we can accomplish in a limited amount of time.

Whether we are visiting loved ones, shopping, attending holiday work functions, or running simple errands, there is a lot to do. If the holiday season is making you feel anxious, or exhausted, here are some hints to help manage overload:

Tips for staying well during the holiday season

- **Prioritize.** Make a list of all the things you need to do, and decide which ones are the most important. Do those first and get to the rest if you have time. Get the important things out of the way, first.
- **Stop striving for perfection.** We're often so wrapped up in buying the perfect gifts or cooking the perfect meals that we don't enjoy the holidays. Ask for help with errands or cooking, and find shortcuts. For example, if you don't have time to make cookies from scratch for the office potluck, buy them. People won't mind.
- **Learn to say "no."** With shopping and social events piled on top of busy jobs, parenting responsibilities, and everyday household responsibilities, we sometimes have to say "no" to people. It can be difficult, but if we don't, we can quickly find ourselves overscheduled and overwhelmed.
- **Don't neglect your health.** It's easy to skip the gym when you need to go to the mall, or grab fast food between all of your errands. But during busy, stressful times, it's even more important to eat well, exercise and get plenty of sleep. This will keep your energy levels up, elevate your mood, and help you maintain a strong immune system.
- **Find time to relax.** When at work, keep your lunch hour for yourself. Don't do chores or errands on your lunch break, and don't just continue working away. Also, try to relax for 10 or 15 minutes at home every night. For example, you could enjoy a good book or a hot bath.

Avoiding conflict

The holiday season may force us to be with people we don't get along with, or who manage to irritate and upset us. If you find yourself in such a situation, try to avoid discussing subjects that are likely to cause conflict. Relatives who have always gotten on your nerves or made you feel bad probably won't change, so ignore their behaviour and concentrate on enjoying yourself.

Children can also act out during the holiday season. The decorations, activities, sugary treats and disruption to their normal schedules can affect them in different ways. Watch for signs that they're becoming overwhelmed and understand that any bad behaviour might be their way of expressing their stress. It helps to talk to children about what they can expect as the holidays get underway. Ask them if all the activity is making them feel anxious or sad.

You can help children maintain a sense of normalcy by including quiet family time in your plans, such as reading books together or taking leisurely walks as a family. This provides a "time out" from the excitement of the season.

Surviving the season

The barrage of holiday music, images, television programs and traditions are sometimes impossible to escape, and it's easy for some of us to feel alienated. The hectic time of year may leave you feeling isolated, uninspired, or in need of support. If you're in such a situation, try the following:

- **Don't isolate yourself.** If you're feeling left out, find a way to join in. Even if it's just walking around the neighbourhood looking at the lights or going skating. There is always lots to do during the holidays.
- **Consider volunteering.** There are plenty of opportunities to volunteer at shelters, places of worship, immigrant centres, hospitals, nursing homes, or through organizations that promote literacy or provide housing, meals, and clothes to those in need.
- **Get emotional support.** If you're missing loved ones who have passed away or can't be there to celebrate in person, make sure you reach out to friends or other family members who can give you the emotional support you need. Additionally, contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program for further assistance.

During the holiday season, it's important to maintain your sense of humour. Despite things going wrong and your patience being tested constantly, remember that it's the most wonderful time of year — so kick back and enjoy the festivities.

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