

## **Tips for Navigating the Holidays with Care**

There's no denying it: The days are growing colder, darker, and shorter, and winter is on its way. For many people, this seasonal shift can feel especially challenging when combined with the expectations of the holidays.

This time of year often comes with pressure to feel merry and to celebrate, all while juggling family obligations, social commitments, and personal expectations which can increase stress levels. In fact, for those who struggle with anxiety, depression, trauma, or other personal challenges, this time of year may not feel very festive at all.

Fortunately, there are some tried and true strategies that can make this season feel a little more manageable and reduce stress levels:

- Keep your regular routine.
- Think moderation.
- Keep expectations realistic.
- Stay connected.
- Release guilt wherever possible.
- Don't be alone, if you don't want to be.
- Focus on today, not yesterday.
- Just say no.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Be good to yourself.

In addition to these time-tested suggestions, several local mental health experts offer their own strategies for reducing stress during the holidays:

- Do only what you can. Take breaks, if you need to, or leave a party early.
- Don't be a perfectionist; keep it simple.
- You don't have to fit all your celebrating into one day.
- Avoid hot-button topics at social gatherings.
- Don't take it too seriously and have fun.
- If you don't get along with certain people, avoid spending time with them, or keep it short if you do see them.
- Engage in activities that truly make you happy, such as exercise, art projects, and reading.
- Attend therapy, if needed.
- Practice meditation.
- Volunteer for a local organization.
- Surround yourself with supportive family and loved ones.
- Think about less stressful alternatives for preparing or hosting a special meal. Ask guests to bring a dish to share—potlucks can save the day!
- You don't need to do it all. Think about the people, traditions, and activities that mean the most to you and focus on those.

So as the days get shorter and colder, adjusting your expectations may help you find more peace and even moments of joy during the season. And remember, even the longest winter eventually gives way to spring, bringing with it warmer temperatures and longer days. Until then, give yourself permission to move through the holidays in the way that feels right for you.

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