

# Managing the Stress of Holiday Expectations

The holidays are here and the kids have high expectations, but the budget is tight. Or , you're alone. Or, you've recently lost a loved one. Or, you have not done the shopping you swore you would do early.

Many people suffer from anxiety and depression during the holidays because of the expectations they put on themselves or their inability or lack of desire to meet self-imposed or imagined demands.

If this time of year is difficult for you, you can take steps to ward off the holiday blues.

## Embrace Imperfection

Striving for perfection brings undue stress. Your celebration doesn't have to be perfect to be memorable and fun for your family.

Make a few deadlines for yourself to space out the shopping, cleaning, and cooking for the rest of season. *Enlist help from family members to ease the burden on you*.

Set reasonable goals. Do you really need to repaint your kitchen before the big dinner? Are all the same decorations really necessary? Map out what you want your holiday gathering to be and cross off anything that will be too difficult or unnecessary. Stay grounded—it's healthier.

## Resist Financial Pressure

Setting a budget and sticking to it for holiday gift buying and food shopping will help you avoid the stress of worrying about how you will pay your bills following the holidays. Gifts don't have to be expensive to be meaningful and appreciated.

You may want to consider asking family members to pick names from a basket instead of everyone buying gifts for each other. Many families do this and enjoy the intrigue of not knowing who selected their names.

As for the meals and goodies, most people overbuy for the holidays, and the leftovers end up in the trash. Make a list before you go to the grocery store or submit your order online. Consider asking family members to contribute a dish or a dessert for the gathering, so everyone shares in the cost.

## Alone or Facing Loss

Whether you can't go home because of work obligations or circumstances are preventing you from being with your family for the holidays, being alone can be disheartening.

Consider celebrating with friends before or after the holiday, or perhaps volunteer at a charity holiday meal to lift your spirits. (Those who've done, say it helps.) The act of planning and knowing you have a strategy going forward will provide relief from stress.

Don't keep your aloneness a secret. If friends know you will be alone, they may invite you to celebrate with their families.

The holiday season brings with it expectations of joy and an elevated mood. This form of pressure to have your mood conform to larger expectations around you can produce additional stress.

So, if you've recently lost a loved one, permit yourself to be sad and take time to cry to express your feelings.

## Maintain Your Health

The demands on your time during the holidays can lead to ignoring healthy habits you usually practice.

Don't overindulge just because it's the holidays. You can enjoy the special cakes, cookies, and cocktails of the season, but do it in moderation. If you usually walk in the park or work out at the gym three times a week, make time for that beneficial exercise. In other words, make time for yourself. Your holidays will be happier and healthier.

## What the EAP Can DO

Many people experience holiday anxiety and blues because of the expectations they put on themselves, financial concerns, recent loss, or loneliness. Don't forget about your EAP.

Setting realistic goals and planning can help you navigate the holidays, but support from the EAP can make it easier.

If you experience depression during this hectic season, or if this year has been particularly challenging, the EAP can help you find the support you need to navigate and enjoy the holidays. Later, turn to the EAP to help you with challenges in the new year.



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