



# Avoiding Holiday Stress

In theory, nothing sounds nicer than a break from school and routine. However the holidays can also bring a lot of stress. When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past. Here are 10 tips to make your time off more enjoyable.

1. **Set aside differences.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
2. **Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
3. **Get Moving and Practice Healthy Habits.** When the urge to run out the door strikes, listen to it! Heading out for a walk or jog in the brisk air can improve any mood and can reduce stress hormones like cortisol in the body. Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on holiday food. Get plenty of sleep and try to maintain sleep routines for your baby.
4. **Do It Yourself.** Taking on a specific project or responsibility can give you a boost of energy and motivation to do something besides watch reality TV. Instead of loafing around in the kitchen, stay busy by helping with chores like collecting cans for a food drive, cleaning the house, or making gifts for the people you love.
5. **Put the Bottle Down.** Sipping on spiked eggnog or a hot buttered rum is part of the fun, but it's no surprise that alcohol + crowded rooms + family grudges = a whole lot of drama. Alcohol lowers inhibitions and makes some people more aggressive, so helping others avoid drugs and alcohol is a good way to keep the peace.
6. **Mind Over Matter:** Feeling really overwhelmed? Find a private space and do some basic meditation to get back on track. Mindfulness meditation can help reduce stress and anxiety.
7. **Be realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.
8. **Positive Pals.** Hang out with people who make you feel good about yourself. Spend the most time with supportive relatives and just catch up briefly with others. There's no reason to be constantly surrounded by negative influencers.
9. **Pace Yourself.** If you're scheduled to attend two or three holiday parties in a day, consider taking a step back. It's easy to wind up overbooked. Set some boundaries around what you and your child do and do not have energy for, and stick to them to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
10. **Love Is All Around.** At the end of the day, remember what the holidays are really about. When family-induced stress threatens, take a minute to think about the bigger picture and give thanks for what's often taken for granted. Focus on what's going right or went right in the past year instead of what's wrong. The holidays are a great time to practice gratitude.

## 6 Alternatives to Buying Gifts while Still Feeling Generous

**Create a coupon book** that includes things that you can do for the other person...“a morning of sleeping in”, cooking a meal, “running an errand”

**Make gifts.** Reuse jars and create sugar scrubs, cocoa mixes, picture collages, music compilations/song lists, etc.

**Give the gift of time.** Offer some quality time for a walk, a cup of coffee or tea sometime after the holidays, popcorn on the couch with Netflix, etc.

**Create games or other toys** for the children in your life (be sure they are age appropriate and safe)

**Recycle...**gifts, games, clothes you no longer wear

**Write a note or poem** that includes how you appreciate the other person, plain or decorative, it will mean more than a store bought gift



## HOLIDAY BILL OF RIGHTS

You have the right to...

- Take care of yourself.
- Feel mixed up emotions around the holidays.
- Spend time alone thinking, reflecting and relaxing.
- Say "no" to party invitations.
- Ask for help and support from family, friends and community service agencies
- Say "no" to alcohol, drugs...and seconds on dessert.
- NOT to ride with a drunk driver, to take their keys away and to call a taxi for them.
- Give gifts that are within your holiday budget.
- Enjoy your holiday the way you want.

Source: Mental Health America;  
Oneida Health Promotions: Holiday Survival Kit

## 3 Easy Tips for Keeping Holidays Stress-Free for Your Baby

When parents are stressed during the holidays, their children will pick up those feelings and react accordingly. For infants and toddlers interruptions in routine can also be stressful. Following these three tips will help both you and your child recognize holiday anxiety and feel less stress – some pre-planning is the best way to enjoy the festivities!

1. Try to schedule activities around naptimes, mealtimes and bed times. Keep healthy snacks with you for your baby in case a meal time is delayed. Keep bedtime routines as close to normal as possible. Watch for signs your child is becoming stressed and overly tired- fussiness, ear pulling, and clinging behaviors.
2. Practice Time-In and take some time out. If you see that your baby is becoming overwhelmed by strangers, noise, all the unusual activity, take him/her to a quiet room to have some snuggle time with you or outside for a walk, some time to run around or explore.
3. **Don't forget your child's favorite blanket or stuffed animal when you run errands or travel.** A bit of home will reduce your **baby's** holiday anxiety.