

HOW TO STRESS LESS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

The holiday season brings joy and happiness to millions of Americans each year. However, with that joy often comes the stress and pressure of meeting the obligations and expectations of family, friends and work, which can take the joy out of the happiest time of the year. Before you accept holiday stress as the norm, here are 10 stress-causing pitfalls -- and their solutions -- to help your holiday season be a relaxing one.



Holiday stress? 10 Ways to relax and enjoy the season

Dec 10, 2011 4:00 AM by [Dr. Trevor Small, Psy.D.](#)

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Don't overextend yourself

Holiday pitfall: The demands of the holiday season are different from other times of the year. For example, you may be required to attend family and work holiday parties that involve late nights and a feeling that you have to network until the wee hours of the morning.

Stress-less solution: It's important to plan ahead. Get a sense of how many functions you have to attend and try to prioritize those that are the most important. Making sure to schedule a lighter day after a big event is important, as it will allow you to recover without having to push yourself into exhaustion.

It really is the thought that counts

Holiday pitfall: The pressure to purchase "the perfect gift" for your boyfriend, husband and/or friends turn into a big stress point.

Stress-less solution: A gift is something that you give to someone you care about as a token of your feelings, not as an object that has a direct monetary connection to how much you care or don't care for them. Try to be thoughtful but not obsessive. The joy of receiving a gift should come from the thought that someone was thinking about you when they purchased the item, not that they spent four paychecks on it.

Follow a budget

Holiday pitfall: Financial concerns often become more evident during this time of the year as you try to balance travel, gifts and entertaining on top of what may be an already stretched budget.

Stress-less solution: Make sure to set a budget for your holiday shopping and stay within it! It can be very inviting to buy that one extra present or take that holiday you've always wanted, but make sure that you can afford it both in the short- and long-term. Planning is key to making sure that your holiday dollars stretch far enough, without piling up big debts.

Avoid social networking loneliness

Holiday pitfall: With Facebook, it's easy to find out what parties and events are happening -- including ones you may not have been invited to. Feelings of loneliness or being "left out" can often lead to more stress during this holiday season.

Stress-less solution: It's normal to compare yourself to others but try not to focus too much on what you see. Facebook and other social networking sites can sometimes increase feelings of isolation or jealousy. If you find yourself too focused on what you are seeing, make the conscious choice not to look at those sites until after the holidays and focus on the events you *are* attending, as well as a more relaxed holiday schedule.

Drink responsibly

Holiday pitfall: With the holiday cocktail party comes the holiday cocktail -- or three. Handling the fallout of one too many drinks at a party can be stressful and anxiety-provoking.

Stress-less solution: At Bridges to Recovery, we often hear of our clients using alcohol and/or other substances to help them navigate stressful parties or events. It is normal to feel nervous in a social situation, but drinking too much can lead to very negative consequences both professionally and personally. Instead, make an effort to set goals about how many new people you will meet or how many friends you will speak to before you order your first drink; and set a limit on the number of drinks you will have at any given event, so you stay responsible and safe for the holiday season.

Be proactive with a new beau

Holiday pitfall: Navigating the stress of deciding whether you should invite your new "friend" to your family holiday party.

Stress-less solution: New relationships are fun but they are also filled with lots of stress, especially because of all the questions that have not been asked. It's a perfect time to ask your new friend if he would be comfortable coming to the party and if so, how should you introduce him. Be prepared for him to say that he is not ready yet -- and that's OK! If so, make a special plan with him for another night.

Give yourself plenty of time when traveling

Holiday pitfall: Holiday travel -- about as stressful as it can get.

Stress-less solution: Travel in general has become more stressful in the United States, and holiday travel always seems to ratchet up the pressure. Give yourself lots of time to get where you need to go and bring activities for the little ones. Pacing the activities by the hour often helps pass the time and try to allow yourself some quiet time by listening to music or reading a book for just a few minutes to help recharge your battery during the flight.

Abbreviate but don't eliminate exercise

Holiday pitfall: Exercise routines and typical self-care activities such as going to your favorite yoga class or going for a long walk in the neighborhood may be too difficult to fit into your busy holiday schedule.

Stress-less solution: Make sure to take time for yourself wherever your travels may take you. Even 20 minutes a day can help you recharge and relax so that your stress levels will drop. It may also be a great time to try out a new class or gym in your area to invigorate your exercise routine and help you stay fit and relaxed during the holidays. And don't forget that exercise also helps combat those extra calories that you may be enjoying during the holiday season.

Put your differences aside for holiday sake

Holiday pitfall: Navigating family "issues" often becomes a stressful experience, especially if you must attend events that mean you will spend time with estranged family members.

Stress-less solution: In those situations, follow this mantra: *Keep it civil and simple.* Christmas morning around the tree is probably not the time to bring up old disagreements with a long-lost uncle. Try to be respectful of others' boundaries and if you find yourself ready to get into a fight, it's time to say goodnight.

Practice your communication skills

Holiday pitfall: Long-simmering disagreements about holiday rituals, vacations and allocation of resources among couples and families become more stressful during this period.

Stress-less solution: The holidays are a great time to open up lines of dialogue with your friends and partners about their ideas and wishes for the holiday season. Try to be an active listener with them and ask them to be the same. Perhaps the best gift of all is becoming closer to those around you and learning how to lean on them when you feel the pressure and stress of the holidays become too much -- and be there for them as well!