

# TIPS FOR REDUCING HOLIDAY STRESS

## Take care of YOU!!

- Be kind to yourself - talk to yourself just like you would talk to your best friend;
- Make sure you get enough sleep;
- Take a break and spend time by yourself (even 30 minutes alone can be refreshing!);
- Exercise - get outside and take a walk or stick with your regular exercise activities;
- Relax - enjoy activities that you find relaxing. Whether you enjoy sitting by the fire and reading a book or watching a movie with your family or listening to music or cooking or - gasp - playing board games, or playing a video game with friends, or doing something else, just take time to relax!

**Be kind to others.** Make an effort to accept your family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Remember that others may be feeling stressed due to the holidays. Do your best to not get hooked into family drama and focus on spending time together.

**Avoid the perfection trap.** Take the pressure off yourself to have a "perfect holiday." Nothing is perfect, including the holidays! Watch out when you start comparing yourself to others on social media. Even though their lives may seem more exciting, glamorous and "more perfect" than yours, chances are they are experiencing their own challenges during the holidays.

**Be flexible with traditions.** As people and families grow and change, traditions often change as well. Choose some traditions to keep, let go of traditions that no longer meet your needs or the needs of others, and be open to creating new traditions.

**Be grateful.** Remind yourself of the true meaning of the holidays and recognize the many gifts in life. Be grateful to have the chance to be with people you care about, to savor special foods, and to enjoy special traditions.

You can also practice gratitude by:

- Making a gratitude list or keeping a gratitude diary (write down 10 or more things you are grateful for each day)
- Writing a thank-you note expressing your appreciation to a family member, friend, or someone who has touched your life

\*\*The more you practice gratitude, the more often you will experience it and the deeper your gratitude will become.

**Look at the Big Picture.** Holidays are a good time to reflect on the past year. It's important to recognize your progress and your resilience during this challenging time! You can ask yourself:

- Was there a difficult situation I handled well?
- Did I exhibit a strength or talent this year that was helpful to another person?
- Was there an experience that helped me grow?
- Did I receive an insight or an understanding that changed me for the better?

**Practice Mindfulness.** Try some of these mindfulness strategies to help you be more present and peaceful during the holidays.

- Take 5 or 10 minutes (or more) by yourself and just focus on breathing - you'll be amazed how it helps you relax!
- If you enjoy meditation, schedule some time to sit each day
- Practice active listening - you'll be able to really connect with others
- Observe and be open to emotions - your own and those of people around you
- Practice self-compassion

- Schedule some time to step away from your phone/computer/TV (even an hour a day will make a difference)
- Eat your holiday meal (and goodies) slowly and savor each bite
- Give yourself permission to PLAY!! 😊
- Take a walk and experience the beauty of nature

**Delegate while you celebrate.** You don't have to do everything yourself - try tackling your "to do" list with others. Enjoy spending time with family and friends while you prepare meals, decorate, shop, and clean.

**Set priorities and plan ahead.** Decide what must get done and what can wait. Make lists to help you keep on top of tasks and events. Plan your menus and then make shopping lists to avoid last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. Line up help for party prep and cleanup.

**\*\*Learn to say "NO."** Holidays can make you feel out of control and at the mercy of traditions or expectations. Take control of the holidays by refusing to let them control you. Pick and choose the events you want to attend and remember that you don't have to do it all. Enjoy the things you care about and let go of the rest.

**Stick to a budget.** Decide how much money you can afford to spend for gifts, food, and entertainment, and stick to your budget! Gift giving doesn't have to be extravagant to be meaningful. Pay attention to your thoughts that tell you gifts must cost a lot to be worthwhile. You can acknowledge someone who is important to you by giving them a heartfelt card, a book, a bouquet of flowers, or a plate of homemade treats.

**Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone you love has recently died or you can't be with loved ones over the holidays, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. Give yourself permission to cry or express your feelings in other ways. Don't try to force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

**Reach out.** Seek out family members and friends for companionship. Volunteering your time to help others is a great way to lift your spirits and broaden your social network. Ask for emotional support or other kinds of support if you need it. Seek professional help if you're having significant difficulty coping with stress, are feeling overwhelmed, or need alcohol/drugs to cope.