

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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Stress, depression and the holidays: Tips for coping Mayo Clinic

Stress and depression can ruin your holidays and hurt your health. Being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support can help ward off stress and depression.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. The holidays often present a dizzying array of demands — cooking meals, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few. And if coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is spreading in your community, you may be feeling additional stress, or you may be worrying about your and your loved ones' health. You may also feel stressed, sad or anxious because your holiday plans may look different during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. You may even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you would.

Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression

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.

1. Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones for other reasons, 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.
2. Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events or communities. Many may have websites, online support groups, social media sites or virtual events. They can offer support and companionship.

If you're feeling stress during the holidays, it also may help to talk to a friend or family member about your concerns. Try reaching out with a text, a call or a video chat.

Volunteering your time or doing something to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. For example, consider dropping off a meal and dessert at a friend's home during the holidays.

3. 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. For example, if your adult children or other relatives can't come to your home, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos. Or meet virtually on a video call. Even though your holiday plans may look different this year, you can find ways to celebrate.
4. 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.
5. Stick to a budget. Before you do your gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.

Try these alternatives:

- Donate to a charity in someone's name.
 - Give homemade gifts.
 - Start a family gift exchange.
6. Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, connecting with friends and other activities. Consider whether you can shop online for any of your items. Plan

your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for meal prep and cleanup.

7. Learn to say no. Saying yes when you want to say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
8. Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.

Try these suggestions:

- Have a healthy snack before holiday meals so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.
 - Eat healthy meals.
 - Get plenty of sleep.
 - Include regular physical activity in your daily routine.
 - Try deep-breathing exercises, meditation or yoga.
 - Avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol and drug use.
 - Be aware of how the information culture can produce undue stress, and adjust the time you spend reading news and social media as you see fit.
9. Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Find an activity you enjoy. Take a break by yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

Some options may include:

- Taking a walk at night and stargazing
 - Listening to soothing music
 - Reading a book
10. Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Take control of the holidays

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

How to Help Kids Handle Holiday Disappointment During COVID-19

Posted on October 30, 2020

Connecticut Childrens'

By: Amy Adolfo Signore, PhD, MPH and Emily Wakefield, PsyD

This year has been difficult to say the least. With the holidays approaching – and the challenges and uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic still ongoing – you may be wondering how to help your child cope with the disappointment of things being different this year.

Connecticut Children's pediatric psychologists join the blog with advice.

(We've grouped suggestions by age, but tips for younger children apply to older children and adults alike.)

0-3 years old: Focus on quality time during the holidays – and don't worry about the details.

- Children this age will not be able to recall detailed memories of holidays past and will not recall the events of this year in the future.
- It's okay to keep things very simple for children this age in terms of celebrations and explanations.
- All children benefit from having quiet-down time to feel love and attention from parents. With social distancing and quarantine measures in place, this is the perfect season to indulge kids with affection.

> Related: For Happier Holidays in Quarantine, Practice Gratitude This Thanksgiving

4-6 years old: Create new, quarantine-approved holiday traditions.

- Establish traditions within your immediate family – make holiday decorations, make a home-made gift, cook a special meal.
- Instead of in-person visits with friends, family or even Santa, consider fun ways to have a video interaction, write letters or make cards.
- Don't punish children for having a negative reaction to holiday changes this year. Tell them that it's okay to feel sad, disappointed or angry.
- Find the positive and teach positive self-talk. For example, "Since we don't have to travel, we get extra time to relax and play at home."

> Related: 8 Ways to Celebrate a Virtual Thanksgiving During COVID-19

6-12 years old: Help your child cope with holiday blues – and build resilience for the future.

- At this age, children understand the precautions that need to be taken due to COVID-19.
- Validate their feelings of disappointment and sadness about changes to their holiday traditions: It's normal and OK to feel angry, frustrated or sad.
- Remember that helping children overcome disappointment helps them build resiliency.
- Ask them for their ideas about how to make the holiday special.
- Teach fun relaxation strategies – try yoga for the first time, or practice slowly breathing in and out the scent of a favorite treat, lotion or candle.

> Related: Growing Resilient: What Your Child Needs to Get Through Tough Times

13-18 years old: Ask, listen and encourage COVID-safe holiday activities.

- Ask teens how they are feeling.

- Let them know you are there if they need to talk.
- Listen! Often, teens just want someone to listen and not solve the problem for them.
- Offer perspective on the situation by looking at the big picture.
- Allow them a sense of control by giving them choices – maybe to have friend over on a different day to celebrate the holiday, or allow them to plan a special activity.
- Encourage positive social activities to honor the holiday season, such as how to volunteer in a socially distanced way.

> Related: Is Your Teen Stressed, Sad or Angry? They May Be Feeling Grief

Parents and caregivers: Manage your own disappointment about this holiday season.

- Allow yourself to feel sad, worried or angry.
- Do something to nurture yourself.
- Adjust your expectations.
- Look at the big picture.
- Children take cues from their parents. If you maintain a positive, festive and calm demeanor, your kids will pick up on that and do the same.

In addition to finding ways to understand and support the feelings of your kids, you can also find creative ways to celebrate the holidays despite the pandemic. We've included a few suggestions in the Related Links below.

Let this be your guide to finding all the hope, peace, joy and sense of renewal that a traditional holiday season brings.



Parenting Corner
How to Raise Emotionally Healthy Children
<https://psychcentral.com/lib/how-to-raise-emotionally-healthy-children/>
The Whole Brain Child – Animated
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vBEI79_oQE
**Copies of The Whole Brain Child available in the office

Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous:	780-424-5900
	www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
Al-Anon/Alateen:	780-433-1818
Support Network / Referral Line:	211
Distress Line:	780-482-4357
Cocaine Anonymous:	780-425-2715

Access 24/7 – 780 424 2424