

COPING WITH HOLIDAY STRESS

As joyous as the holiday season can be, it can also cause a lot of stress. Wanting to buy everyone the perfect gift, trying to attend every holiday gathering, hosting a party, meeting end-of-year deadlines at work, traffic, spending, and crowds can each cause stress, and put a damper on the season.

Plus, stress has a negative impact on your health. It can cause muscle tension, headaches, chest pain, an upset stomach, and sleep issues. It can affect your mood and trigger depression, anxiety, anger, irritability, and restlessness. Stress has also been associated with undereating and overeating, tobacco use, drug and alcohol abuse, angry outbursts, and social withdrawal.

The following tips can help you keep your stress level down and help you enjoy the season.

BE REALISTIC WITH YOURSELF.

It can be easy to get hung up on making your gifts, parties, decorations, and traditions perfect, and maintaining all the traditions you have with your family and friends. But you may need to simplify some of your traditions and rituals. Choose a few to hold on to, and have fun creating new ones.

CREATE A BUDGET AND STICK TO IT.

Before you start shopping for the holiday, decide what you can afford, and then stick to the budget. You don't have to buy pricey gifts to make your loved ones happy. You could donate to a charity in your loved one's name or start a family gift exchange to cut down on the gifts everyone has to purchase.

PLAN AHEAD.

During the holidays, you only have a little time to prepare. Scheduling everything on your calendar and knowing exactly what you need to do and buy can help prevent you from scrambling at the last minute for forgotten gifts or ingredients.

KNOW THAT IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO.

Spreading yourself too thin during the holidays can send your stress level soaring. Your friends, family, and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in everything.

MAINTAIN YOUR HEALTHY HABITS.

Overindulgence and a lack of physical activity can add to your holiday stress and guilt. Make sure you're getting plenty of sleep, incorporating physical activity into your daily routine, and having healthy snacks before holiday gatherings so you don't go overboard on food and drinks.

TAKE A BREATH IF YOU NEED IT.

Make sure you're making time for yourself, even if it's for just 15 minutes. Set aside time to be alone without any distractions to do something you enjoy doing for yourself and that reduces your stress, clears your mind, slows your breathing, and restores your inner calm.

This article was adapted from information provided by Crozer-Keystone Health System. Image Shutterstock.com/samnitine.