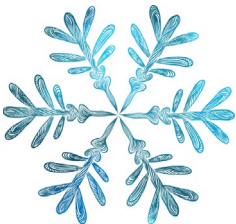




Coping with the Holidays



M·H·A·R·S

MENTAL HEALTH, ADDICTION AND RECOVERY SERVICES
BOARD OF LORAIN COUNTY

Happy Holidays?

We all strive to make the holidays the best time of the year. There is an expectation to have the perfect holiday for ourselves, family and friends. This often unrealistic goal is reflected in movies, television, books, stories of holidays past and our own internal ideals.

But, we all too readily find out that this goal of achieving the perfect holiday is only a myth. With our fast-paced lifestyles, we do not have the time or energy to do everything. Baking homemade treats, finding perfect gifts, decorating, entertaining our friends, and working full- or part-time jobs, leaves little time for ourselves.

This booklet offers suggestions on how you and your family can cope well with the holidays. You can reduce your stress level by following a few simple tips. By watching what you spend, eat, drink, and, in general, take charge of your life, you will be better prepared to enjoy the season!



Stress and the Holidays

The holiday season is ideally the happiest time of the year. However, it is often one of the most difficult, and depression is widespread. One explanation for the “unexplainable” depression is expecting too much! When we are bombarded with, “Tis the season to be jolly,” and we feel less than jolly, we sense that something must be wrong. The holidays, in fact, become a time of “too much”: doing too much, eating too much, drinking too much, and spending too much.

Tips for Beating Holiday Stress

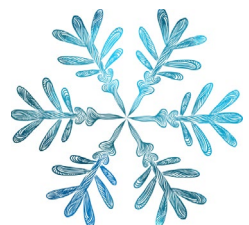
1. Practice moderation in your activities, as well as in eating, drinking, and spending. Don't get overtired.
2. Prioritize your preparations. List what must be done and what would be nice to do. As pressures mount, relax and concentrate on the “must” list.
3. For an extra “lift,” surprise someone with unexpected kindness. It will make his or her day – and your holiday.
4. Keep reminding yourself of what the holiday season is all about.
5. Enjoy free holiday activities, such as admiring holiday decorations or visiting with friends.
6. Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you. Make new friends if you are alone during special times. Contact someone with whom you lost touch.
7. Don't drink too much. Excessive drinking will only make you more depressed.
8. Don't be afraid to try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a way you have not done before.
9. Find time for yourself! Don't spend all your time providing activities for others.

Recovery and the Holidays

The holiday season can be a joyous time, but for those in recovery from a substance use disorder, it can also be a high-risk season. These tips are excerpted from the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation's "Living in Recovery and Avoiding Relapse during the Holidays" document:

Tips for Avoiding Relapse

1. Plan your support system ahead of time. "Bookend" events with planned before-and-after telephone calls to someone in recovery. Limit time in stressful situations or around difficult people and always have an "escape plan."
2. Understand the emotional complexity of the holidays.
3. Focus on others. The holidays offer a spiritual opportunity to practice focusing on others with gratitude and joy. Adopting this perspective can take tremendous courage. Because you are in recovery, you have already demonstrated the capacity for tremendous courage and change. Look for ways to think about others.
4. Keep track of what you are drinking and steer clear of rationalizations. If you accidentally pick up the wrong drink and swallow some alcohol, this doesn't mean you will relapse but watch out for rationalizations, which could creep in: "Hmm. I guess I can handle this after all. Perhaps my period of abstinence taught me how to control my drinking." No. Tell someone who is supportive of recovery about it as soon as possible. A mistake is not a relapse—but it can lead to one if kept a secret.
5. Avoid vulnerable situations. If Uncle Bob will try to mix you a stiff drink, stay away from him.
6. Remember self care.
7. If you need treatment, consider getting it during the holidays. In Lorain County, Ohio, call the Navigator 440-240-7025.



Gambling and the Holidays

BeforeYouBet.org notes that if you plan to gamble this holiday season, there are seven things to keep in mind.

Tips for Responsible Gambling

1. Gambling should only be for fun. It is not, and never will be, a way to invest or earn money.
2. Always limit how much you are willing to lose, as well as how much time you spend gambling.
3. When you get ahead, quit. Don't feel pressured to gamble with winnings to win more; be satisfied that you came out ahead.
4. Realize that you should be able to afford to lose any money you bet.
5. Never gamble just because you are bored or to decrease stress.
6. Maintain other interests and hobbies other than just gambling.
7. If you lose money one time gambling, don't gamble another time with just the intent to win the money back. Once it's gone, it's gone.



Taking Charge

Taking charge of your life will help you reduce stress. For some people, being assertive is hard. However, not being assertive during the holidays and trying to please, often bring financial problems, depression, and other illness.

10 Ways to “Take Charge” during the Holidays

1. Know your needs and ask people to help you meet them.
2. Don't expect more from others than you are willing to give yourself.
3. Have a plan of action to help you enjoy the holidays (who, how, what, when).
4. Think positively about yourself, your family, your friends, and your situation.
5. Take advantage of available events and activities that do not cost money (public concerts, displays, etc.).
6. Do not compare yourself to others.
7. Plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time to coordinate activities.
8. Count your blessings. See the cup as half full, rather than half empty.
9. Learn to live more with less.
10. Pat yourself on the back for getting through another holiday.



Dealing with a Loss

The holidays can be painful for those who have lost a loved one or gone through divorce, especially for children. Coping with separation and loss is magnified during the holidays. People may feel pressured to celebrate the holidays, while their world seems to be falling apart.

How to Help Someone Deal with Grief

1. Allow them to talk about their feelings and memories, and try to get them involved in new activities.
2. Change your traditional pattern in some way; have the family dinner at a different place, or open the gifts at a different time. Create new rituals and family traditions.
3. Don't let a person spend too much time alone. If a person becomes depressed or starts drinking or using drugs to cope, help is available 24/7 at 1-800-888-6161.
4. Remember, many people think of their pets as part of the family, and their loss can be just as painful.



Surviving Divorce

1. After divorce, be sure to let the children know that the holidays will continue, but in a different way. When making plans, be sure to decide ahead of time how the holidays will be divided and remember to include the children in this planning.
2. Make sure you and your children have realistic expectations.
3. Try to get plenty of rest, exercise and eat healthy so you will be better able to cope. Remember, tired children are more easily stressed and likely to be moody.
4. Plan fun activities. If memories are too painful, consider a vacation, or a visit to out-of-state relatives.
5. Take one day at a time. Rely on support from friends and family, and realize that it will get easier with time.

Improving Holiday Spending

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement, glitz and glitter of the holiday season. We are bombarded with advertising that equates the purchasing of goods with success and happiness. These guidelines are intended to provide some common sense tips to making the holidays happy while staying within a budget.

Money Saving Tips

1. Stop or limit your use of credit cards. It's hard to determine how much you've spent until the credit card bills start to arrive.
2. Take advantage of sales and comparison shopping. You could easily save more than 50% on some purchases. If the item you want isn't on sale, ask if it will be going on sale in the near future.
3. Consider a part-time or seasonal job, especially at stores that offer employee discounts.
4. Gift wrapping can be expensive. Plan ahead and buy next year's paper after the holidays this year for substantial savings.
5. Start in January to save all your change at the end of the day in a jar. Don't use any of it until the holidays.
6. Shop at factory outlet stores or buying clubs that often offer lower prices.
7. Make sure you record all checks, so that none of them are returned because of insufficient funds.
8. Save on postage by sending cards only to those you won't see during the holidays.
9. Watch for special sales later in the season. When holiday spending is sluggish, stores often discount merchandise.

Inexpensive Ways to Celebrate the Holidays

Some of the best ways to create memories are inexpensive. The “little” moments and gifts at holiday times are often the most remembered.

Unique Holiday Gifts/Activities

1. Provide for time with family members and other loved ones. Read stories or poetry together, share fondest holiday memories, bake cookies, etc.
2. Share family history with your children and/or grandchildren, or put together an album of old photographs. These make great gifts and are a good way to pass on family customs and traditions.
3. Give recordings of children singing to grandparents, and have grandparents make recordings of stories of the “good old days” for the family to share.
4. Have family members make a “personal gift bag.” Everyone decorates a paper bag. Then, each person writes something he/she appreciates or especially likes about every other family member on a piece of paper. Each person also writes down what they will “give” every other person—a gift that cannot be bought—and places it in the appropriate bag. For example, a child might write, “Dad, I really appreciate the fact that you take time to help me with the computer. My gift to you will be at least 15 minutes to relax when you get home.”
5. Share some of your favorite recipes. Write them on pretty cards and give them as gifts, or have a cookie exchange with your friends and/or neighbors.
6. Give family heirlooms as gifts. Make sure the gift will be treasured, but at the same time, be sure you are willing to give up all rights of ownership.

A Low-Fat Holiday

Rich, fattening, holiday eating; skipped workouts; stressful shopping: they can add up to extra pounds and low morale, which you deal with for weeks or months after the holidays are over. Be aware of holiday pitfalls and take positive steps to reduce or avoid them.

Helpful Hints

1. Don't skip meals to save on calories. You'll be so hungry that you'll overeat.
2. Snack on low-fat food (fruit and vegetables) before attending parties to avoid overeating rich, fattening foods.
3. Don't keep leftovers around. Send them home in holiday containers with guests.
4. Don't deny yourself all desserts and fun foods. Allow yourself a small sampling of a few special treats, or you will feel deprived and end up overeating.
5. When eating out, do what you can to cut fat. Avoid sauces, gravies, cheese, mayonnaise, butter and margarine, or ask for them on the side. Choose baked, grilled, roasted, steamed, broiled or poached foods instead of fried.
6. Try to eat fruit and vegetables as much as possible (at least one each meal) to offset desserts and meat/cheese fingerfoods.
7. Eat slowly whenever you can so you'll eat less. Spend your time talking with family and friends instead of eating.
8. Avoid or reduce alcohol consumption. It's fattening and can make you want to eat more.
9. Don't start a diet around the holidays. You'll feel guilty when you can't stick with it and end up eating more.

10. Drink lots of water.

11. Offset tiring shopping and holiday stress with regular exercise and time to relax. If you feel yourself becoming stressed, take time to recharge.

12. When preparing foods for holidays, use low-fat recipes. They are just as good and your guests will appreciate it, too.

Best Ever Low-fat Chocolate Chip Cookies

2 ¼ c. unsifted all-purpose flour

6 T butter, softened

¾ c. granulated sugar

1 c. semi-sweet morsels

5 T commercial fruit-based fat substitute

½ c. refrigerated egg substitute, or 4 large egg whites

1 tsp baking soda

1 tsp salt

¾ c. packed brown sugar

1 tsp vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly coat cookie sheets with nonstick cooking spray. In a small bowl, combine flour, baking soda and salt. In a large bowl, combine butter, fat substitute, sugars and vanilla extract. Beat until creamy. Beat in egg substitute or egg whites. Gradually beat in flour mixture. Stir in chocolate chips. Drop rounded teaspoonful onto cookie sheet. Bake 8-10 minutes, until lightly browned. 75 calories (fat 1.1 grams unsaturated, 1.3 grams saturated). Serving size: 2 cookies.

Hot or Cold Spiced Cider

4 c. apple cider (pasteurized)

2 whole cloves

1 stick of cinnamon

2 allspice seeds

1 or 2 pieces of crystallized ginger or dried fruit (apricot, plumb, pineapple, etc.) (optional)

1 4"x4" piece of cheese cloth to make steeping bag

Pour cider into a pot. In the center of the cheese cloth, place your spices and fruit. Tie up the four corners of the cheese cloth to make a bag. Place the spice bag into the cider and bring to a boil. Turn off heat and allow to steep until cool enough to drink, or until it reaches room temperature. Pour it into a container to chill in the fridge.

Beating the Post-Holiday Blues

Once the flurry of holiday activities comes to an end, the friends and family have returned home, and we must resume our daily routine, we may experience post-holiday stress or depression. We feel the loss of increased support we received from family and friends throughout the season. We are no longer caught up in getting a million and one things done, so we need to find things to look forward to in the upcoming winter days. There are things we can do to ward off or cope with these “post-holiday hazards.”

Coping After the Holidays

1. Make plans for a weekend trip or special evening outing.
2. Invite friends for dinner or an evening of games.
3. Visit someone who is homebound, or in a nursing home – it will brighten your day and theirs.
4. Invite your spouse/significant other out for a “date” and let him or her choose the activities for the evening.
5. Plan a special activity to do with your children.
6. Spend some time with family members reflecting on the holidays.
7. Start a new activity. Is there something you have always wanted to do but have never gotten around to learning how to do? If so, see if there are any community courses you can enroll in to learn this new skill.
8. The day the holiday decorations are packed away, get fresh flowers for the house. It helps to brighten your home and your spirits.

Again, the possibilities are endless. It is still a matter of attitude and mindset. Make up your mind not to let the “post-holiday hazards” get a grip on you and your life.

Best Wishes

The hazards of stress, depression and substance use that accompany the holidays will probably always be around. However, you do not have to let them ruin your holidays.

In fact, you can make this season's celebration a beautiful, fulfilling experience for yourself and those close to you. Once you know what to guard against, and how to handle matters in a new way, you and your family will be better able to enjoy the holiday season.

The successful mindset for a happy holiday season requires flexibility and a willingness to break out of old patterns to find new, more satisfying ones. Combined with a little planning and the delegating of tasks, you will be on your way.

Best Wishes and Happy Holidays!

Resources

If the stress of this holiday season, or of any other time of year, becomes too much for you or a loved one to handle, contact us for support:

24-Hour Crisis Hotline:
1-800-888-6161

Non-Emergency Navigator who can answer your questions about available services, how to pay for them, access them, or receive interpretation services (for English and Spanish speakers):
440-240-7025

More information:
mharslc.org

Credits

“Coping with the Holidays” is a community resource intended to offer you helpful tips that may reduce stress during the holidays. Its suggestions are not intended to be all inclusive.

To learn more about services that are available locally, call the Navigator line at 440-240-7025, or review the Services Directory at mharslc.org.

Si usted o su hijo podría necesitar servicios de salud mental, llame al 440-240-7025. Una amable persona va a escuchar sus preocupaciones. Ella le conectará directamente con el servicio de salud mental que pueda necesitar. Y, si usted está preocupado de que las finanzas, el transporte, o la barrera del idioma le impedirá que reciban los servicios que usted necesita, ella te ayudará a manejar esos desafíos, también.

“Coping with the Holidays” is provided to you by the

Mental Health, Addiction and Recovery Services (MHARS) Board
of Lorain County

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