

Although it's easy to envision a marvelous, relaxed holiday season full of pageantry, positivity, and perfect pies, this is not what the splendor of the season always delivers. For many, this time of year is the most stressful.

If you feel stressed out by the thought of holiday chores, obligations, and the clan dropping in for a spell—or if this year's circumstances make the holiday season difficult for whatever reason—start preparations now to manage your holiday stress.

Holiday Myth Busters —

Along with good tidings come high expectations based on the commercialization of the holiday season, past childhood memories we may long to duplicate, and the expectations of others.

If family members count on your “holiday magic” to make every year special—the cooking, cleaning, baking, decorating, and gift-wrapping—you face a bigger challenge letting go or finding balance.

Here's how to cope better with expectations, demands, and added pressure during the holidays.

Decision Time —

Make a decision to take charge and tackle holiday stress. This mentally prepares you to enjoy the time while facing demands of the season with better endurance.

Your Priorities —

Decide on your priorities to make the season meaningful. Did you miss the tour of homes last year because the Waltons next door had their open house on the same day? The idea here is to plan a few “non-negotiable” events for yourself.

Managing Holiday Stress 2011



Now the Rest —

What activities are important to your brood this year? Seek to trim the “idea tree” to reduce stress from trying to fit it all in. A family meeting to gather ideas can work, and chances are activities you thought everyone still wanted are no longer of interest.

Avoid the Rush —

Are holiday lights on the house critical? If yes, go for it, but if it seems more like a “chore” than a pleasurable task, that's a clue about its priority and importance to you. Activities that feel like chores get delayed. Pay attention to procrastination. It is insight to help you decide whether it's thumbs up or down on something that seems desirable.

Fight the Blues —

If the holidays are a sad time of year because of difficult memories or because a loved one can't be there, then discover a personal intervention strategy. Volunteering for a local charity is an interactive experience, and those who've tried it claim it works to lift one's mood. You'll feel empowered and more positive, and the experience of helping others anchors you to a memory that lasts.

Navigating Family Conflict —

If you can't avoid holiday gatherings with family members who experience feuds and conflicts, try discussing with kin your desire to avoid conflict. Be up front and ask that differences be set aside.

Older adults criticizing teenagers is a famous trigger. So are statements from in-laws that appear critical, interfering, or meddlesome. Self-awareness is power, so you stand a good chance of at least minimizing this behavior.

Take Care of Yourself —

What improves your mood—exercise, positive affirmations, alone time? During the year, have you been promising to do something for yourself, but keep putting it off? Do it. The holiday season is a perfect time to reaffirm your love, not only for those you care about but also for yourself.

Family Resources Can Help —

Holiday stress affects everyone differently, so suggestions here may not match what's unique for you. Don't face the stress alone. Instead, talk with Family Resources. We will help you find the resilience and strength you need to face any challenge the holidays may bring. ■