

Coping with Holiday Stress

In Great Britain the word "holiday" has the same meaning as vacation. Many Americans would find this comparison laughable. For most of us, the holidays come with our own "to-do" lists.

Too often we take holiday stress for granted. What's worse, we often have higher expectations for this season than for any other time of the year. Planning for the holidays can leave us feeling impatient, cranky, and, in some cases, depressed. When the realities of day-to-day life conflict with our efforts to make the holiday season perfect, stress results.

Are your expectations for the holidays realistic? Asking yourself this question is the first step to managing holiday stress. List on a piece of paper what you expect from yourself and your family during the holidays. Hidden within these expectations you might find your potential holiday stressors — the things particular to you that can cause stress.

Under each item in the list, write down what changes you can make to prevent or defuse stress. Adopt changes that will be most helpful to you. Avoid holding on to unrealistic goals, such as creating the most enchanting holiday atmosphere. Remember to include your own needs. Here are some examples:

Giving the perfect gifts

- Ask people what they want instead of scouring the earth to find the perfect gifts.
- Shop early, when there is more of a selection.
- Stick to your gift budget.

Planning family get-togethers

- Buy prepared foods, instead of cooking everything from scratch.
- Ask others to bring their favorite dishes.
- Cook and freeze foods ahead of time.

Scheduling time with family and friends

- Simplify holiday commitments and traditions. Discuss with your family which traditions are most important to you and to them. It's okay to re-evaluate past traditions.
- Allow time for yourself. Remember to do things that *you* enjoy.
- Avoid time crunches by making plans to visit some friends and family soon after the holidays.
- Don't over-schedule yourself. Allow enough time to relax and recover after visiting with others.

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