



Managing Your Mental Health During The Holidays

By Colleen O'Day | Dec. 19, 2017

During the holiday season, many look forward to festivities with friends and family. But for others, this time can bring on or worsen stress, anxiety and depression.

There are a variety of **factors**



(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-the-age-anxiety/201111/10-common-holiday-stresses-and-how-cope-them-0>) that can bring on holiday anxiety and depression. Some people experience increased financial burden due to travel, gift and/or hosting costs. Others may feel overwhelmed as the holiday season often includes a packed calendar of parties, performances and traveling that can be difficult to balance with everyday responsibilities and self-care. Not to mention: High expectations to give perfect gifts and plan perfect events, as well as loneliness for those who aren't with loved ones.

If you are experiencing any of these challenges, here are some coping tips you can use to manage your increased levels of anxiety, stress and sadness.

Stay In Therapy

Although the holiday season is overwhelmingly busy, do not cancel your therapy sessions to make time for other activities. The holidays can bring up difficult emotions. If you can, keep your scheduled therapy sessions to ensure you have built-in time to explore anything that comes up.

Mindfulness

In addition to professional mental health care, mindfulness can be a valuable mental wellness tool. Certain practices can be particularly helpful if you are traveling or running on an unusual schedule. If you're new to mindfulness, the **online MSW program (<https://msw.usc.edu/>)** at the University of

Southern California created a **Mindfulness Toolkit** (<https://msw.usc.edu/mindful-living-resources/>) featuring free mindfulness resources, like guided meditations for beginners.

Don't Rely On Drugs And Alcohol

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America **recommends** (<https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/managing-anxiety/managing-holiday-anxieties>) avoiding drugs and alcohol for comfort. While the prospect of escape can be appealing, substance use can ultimately worsen your issues. There is a **20%** (<https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/related-illnesses/substance-abuse>) overlap between people with anxiety or mood disorders and substance use disorders, and substances can exacerbate symptoms. When you feel you need a relaxation aid, you can instead turn to a mindfulness tactic or other healthy coping mechanism.

Soak Up The Sun

Some struggle with depression during the winter months because of **Major Depressive Disorder with a Seasonal Pattern** (<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Depression/Major-Depressive-Disorder-with-a-Seasonal-Pattern>). Exposure to bright lights, including fluorescent lights, can help ease symptoms. Even for those without this form of depression, walking outside in the sun can be an effective centering and calming tool. Numerous **studies** (<http://www.businessinsider.com/scientific-benefits-of-nature-outdoors-2016-4>) have pointed to the mental health benefits of spending time in nature, including stress relief, better concentration, lower levels of inflammation and improved mental energy.

Set Realistic Expectations

Another major source of anxiety, stress and depression around the holidays can be examining accomplishments from the past year. Some may experience negative feelings over not being at a place they feel they “should be” in life. Get yourself out of this space by adjusting expectations and setting realistic goals. For example, if you're trying to establish an exercise routine, try setting a goal of taking a walk three times a week rather than vowing to do CrossFit every day.

Managing mental illness is always challenging, but it can be particularly difficult during the holiday season. While the struggle can feel isolating, remember that you are far from alone. Seek help from professional mental health services, maintain your self-care routines and include mindfulness practices into your days as you approach 2018.

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Comments