

A woman with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the left. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a gold hoop earring. The background is a blurred cityscape at night, with warm yellow and orange lights from buildings and streetlights. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# **STRESS MANAGEMENT**

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**DURING THE HOLIDAYS**

# WELCOME

The holidays are a stressful time for everyone. There are so many gatherings and all kinds of tasks that need to be completed. You have to go to this holiday party with your co-workers and another get-together with your friends. Your kids might have holiday parties at school, and your spouse's employer might host a dinner. Not to mention, you have to buy the gifts, cook the food, clean the house for company, and so much more. There's a lot of pressure to make the holiday season Hallmark movie perfect.

**As much as you want to slow down and enjoy the holidays, you can't because there is just too much to do.** You feel like you can't slow down and enjoy your special family time because of all you have to get done.

Not only does stress affect us mentally, but it can also have a negative impact on our health. When you think of stress, you might think about being overworked and feeling anxious about all you have to get done. You might feel mentally exhausted. Your mental health might plummet. But that's not the only way that stress impacts your life.

**When you're stressed to the max like this, your health can be affected negatively.** For one, you might be depriving yourself of sleep because you have too many things going on in your life. You might be staying up late and waking up early so you can squeeze everything in. Maybe you're missing out on that important downtime we all need.

Stress can lead to a plethora of health issues, including headaches, heartburn, rapid breathing, pounding heart rate, insomnia, weakened immune system, high blood pressure, and more. This leaves you feeling awful physically in addition to feeling awful mentally.

Plus, you should be able to enjoy the holidays and all the special time you get to spend with your loved ones. You shouldn't have to spend the holidays freaking out about all there is to do. That's not fun for anyone.

**To preserve your sanity and your health, use these 12 tips to make the holiday season more enjoyable.**

# 1. SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

It's hard to be realistic about what you can accomplish during the holiday season when you're surrounded by picture-perfect celebrations. You might see your friends, neighbors, and co-workers doing it all. They might be posting on social media about the amazing gifts they've bought for their kids or the big parties they're throwing.

It's hard when we live in a world where we feel like we constantly have to be doing the biggest and best things. In reality, you should do what's best for you and your family.

Work on accepting that there are certain traditions you can keep and others you might have to let go of because they are simply too much to handle. You could even create new traditions that are easier for you to manage.

**It's okay to admit that you need to slow down this holiday season or that you can't make it to every event.** If you typically go to a relative's house for a whole week, try going for just three days so you can have more downtime at home. Instead of cooking a huge meal for all of your friends at your annual gathering, order catering or have each guest bring a dish or dessert.

When you accept that not everything has to be flawless, you can enjoy the holidays more and feel less stressed about everything there is for you to do. You should focus on what matters to you and your family and not what you see everyone else doing.

If you think about it, your friend who is hosting that large gathering is probably stressed out too. Escape from that stress this year.

# 2. STICK TO A BUDGET

One of the major stressors in our lives is money, whether it's the holidays or not. But the holiday season can get very expensive very quickly.

There are so many gifts to buy. There is a lot of food to buy when you're hosting a party or having family stay with you. It adds up fast, and that can be stressful.

**Even if you're financially stable, all of those expenses at once can be a big hit.**

Prior to the holiday season, set a budget for yourself. Be realistic but set a limit on how much you can spend on each gift recipient and on each gathering you go to. It can be hard not to go overboard when you're buying gifts for your loved ones. You simply want to give them the best, which is great, but it can easily get to be too much.

**Remember that happiness isn't about the material things or the money.** Sure, you should try to find nice gifts for the ones you love, but you can do that without breaking the bank.

To save money, you might consider giving homemade gifts this year. You might have a skill that can be turned into a gift. For example, if you knit, you could knit a hat or scarf for each family member. If you paint, create a special piece of artwork to gift to someone.

**An alternative is to start a family gift exchange.** Instead of spending \$25 or \$50 on each member of your extended family, draw names and buy for just one or two people. Plus, this helps everyone to remember the true meaning of the holiday season.

## 3. GET STARTED EARLY

If you're serious about going all out this holiday season, it's important to start early. Let's say you have 25 gifts to buy. If you start buying them a couple of months before the big day, you can focus on buying five or 10 per week.

You might recall a year where you bought all of your gifts a week ahead of time...that was probably stressful for you, because you weren't sure if they would arrive on time and you were frantically trying to find all the right gifts to buy. It was probably pretty chaotic for you.

**You can also start early when it comes to planning parties or attending parties.** If you're planning and hosting a party yourself, you can create a list of what foods you want to serve and who you want to invite months in advance. By doing this, you space out all of the tasks so they're more manageable each day leading up to the gathering.

Perhaps a couple of days before the party, you decorate and clean the house. Then, on the day of the gathering, you can focus on cooking and getting your family all ready for the guests.

If you're attending a party, you can determine the dish you're bringing and what you're wearing a couple of weeks in advance. You can buy a gift for the host at this time too.

Then, right before you leave for the party, you can prepare the dish and be on your way. This is much easier than doing it all on the day of the party.

## 4. ADD SHOPPING DAYS TO YOUR CALENDAR

If you're not shopping online and plan to go out, fit it into your schedule where you can. It might help to plan a whole day to go out and buy gifts so you can get it all done. Then, that's a big task you can check off your list.

**If you decide to do your shopping online, you can still plan a day to sit down on the couch with your laptop.**

Keep in mind that it's important to do this as soon as possible. If you wait too long, the stores are going to be crowded and you will be even more stressed by all of that chaos. Going early can also help to ensure that the things you hope to buy are still in stock. If you wait too long, there may be a limited selection and you'll be short on time, making it hard to find exactly what you're looking for.

Plus, when you plan these days in advance, you can figure out exactly what you need to buy. If you wait too long, you might go shopping last minute and not remember everything you need to get for your loved ones. When you plan ahead, you can be intentional and find the gifts you're looking for.

**To make a shopping day less stressful, consider bringing a friend along.** You can hold each other accountable and stay on track with purchasing the gifts you need to buy. This is a good way to catch up, especially if you might be too busy to get together this holiday.

# 5. MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

In this season of giving and quality time, it's hard to step away from it all and enjoy some quiet time. It's essential to do this though. You have to find ways to slow down, no matter how busy life may be. When you make time for yourself, you're able to recharge and focus on what makes you feel better.

This alone time will look different for each person. Think about what helps you to feel energized. What makes you feel less stressed? What helps you to feel your best?

When you take this time to recharge, you will probably be in a better mood and be able to take on each day better. You will feel calmer and like you can truly enjoy this special time with your loved ones.

It can be difficult to fit in self-care when you have so much going on in your life. To help, consider finding an accountability partner, such as your spouse or a friend. Chances are, the other people in your life could use a reminder to take care of themselves too.

**Here are a few ideas to get you started, but do whatever works for you:**

- Enjoy a cup of tea while you read each morning or evening.
- Go on a walk.
- Spend time journaling each day.
- Do something creative, like drawing or making music.
- Enjoy a bath or shower.
- Give yourself a spa day.
- Take a nap.
- Set daily affirmations.

## 6. STICK TO YOUR HEALTHY-EATING HABITS

What we eat plays a big role in how we feel. Maybe you can think of a specific time that aligns with that statement. Maybe you notice that you feel better inside and out when you nourish your body instead of filling up on processed and sugary foods.

During the holiday season, it's easy to overindulge. When you're at a party, it's easy to grab a cookie and it turns into five cookies (or more). But when this happens, you might be feeling guilty or stressed about all the cookies you ate. This only adds to the overall feeling of overwhelm that you're experiencing.

Of course, it's unrealistic to totally avoid all the holiday treats. This is especially true if you only get to enjoy them during this time of the year. Maybe your great aunt bakes the most amazing pie for the holidays and you only get it once a year.

**It's all about how you approach it though so you can enjoy them without the added stress and guilt.** To make sure you don't go overboard, consider setting a goal for yourself.

Will you only eat one treat at each party instead of sampling the entire dessert table?

Will you eat a nutritious meal before you go so you will be full of healthy foods and eat fewer sweets?

## 7. SAY NO WHEN YOU CAN

This is easier said than done, but it's important. You're going to have to turn some people down throughout the holiday season, and that's okay.

**You can't possibly do it all.** Think of all of the invitations you receive during the holiday season. If you say yes to all of them, you're going to be stretching yourself far too thin. That's where the stress and overwhelm start.

As the invites start rolling in, choose the ones that are most important to you. Set a limit for yourself so you don't overdo it. It can be hard to pick which events to go to and

which to skip, especially if you have a great circle of friends and don't want to miss out. You might choose to go to a friend's party if you don't see them often. Maybe two friends in your circle are both hosting a party, so you go to just one because the same people will be at both.

**Another option is to host a party yourself and invite all of your closest friends.** You will still get to spend time with them, but you won't have to go to a dozen different parties. Just know that planning and hosting a party can be stressful itself, so choose what's less anxiety-inducing for you.

If you are asked to take on additional projects at work during an already stressful time, know that your colleagues and boss should be understanding. The holidays are a busy time for everyone, so they should be able to grasp why you can't add anything else to your to-do list.

## 8. CREATE NEW, RELAXING TRADITIONS

Not every day over the holidays has to be spent doing something big. If you are constantly on the go throughout the holiday season, it's important to find some slower things to do. This might mean that you need to create a few new traditions for you and your family to enjoy. Also, you don't have to scrap all of your big holiday plans. Just try to throw a few more relaxing ones into the mix.

**One idea is to have a holiday movie night.**

If you only include your immediate family, you don't have to worry about baking cookies for all the neighbor kids and cleaning up for hours before hand. You could also take the whole family on a drive to see the holiday lights and decorations in your neighborhood.

You might find a holiday-themed book to read by the fireplace each night. Curl up in your pajamas with a cup of tea and a blanket while you read. You could do this with your family or on your own.



If baking is relaxing for you, find a new recipe to try. Or you could make your own decorations by drying oranges or stringing popcorn. Decorating gingerbread houses with the family is another good idea.

**Wrapping gifts is another opportunity to slow down.** Shopping for gifts can be hectic but wrapping can be relaxing. Spend time finding nice paper, ribbon, and gift tags.

Whatever you choose to do, try to be present and fully enjoy it. Use these slower activities as a way to relax and slow down amid all of the stress.

## 9. ASK FOR HELP

If you're someone who typically does everything on your own, know that it doesn't have to be that way. This holiday season, encourage yourself to get help with all of the tasks you have to complete. There are a few ways you can do this.

For one, you might ask your family members to pitch in and help. Your kids are probably capable of doing some of the chores. Your spouse can buy some of the gifts. By delegating some of the tasks, you will have less on your plate and be able to enjoy the holiday season even more.

You can also ask for help from other people. For example, you might have your groceries delivered so you can avoid the chaos of the grocery store. This will save you time too. Or you could hire someone to clean your home right before the holiday party, so you don't have to worry about that. Hiring a caterer for an event can be helpful too.

**Also, if you're feeling pretty stressed and need some extra support during the holidays, don't be afraid to seek professional help.**

A therapist or psychologist can help you to manage your stress and help you to dig deeper to solve any issues you might be dealing with. It's not uncommon to see a therapist during the busier times in our lives.

Plus, this is a way for you to take some time to focus on yourself and your own needs instead of everyone else's, even for just one hour per week.

# 10. STAY ACTIVE

Take a moment and think about how you feel after a good yoga session or a run through the park. You probably feel all those good endorphins. You might feel lighter or happier. Now, it can be difficult to keep up with your exercise habits during the holiday season. In addition to the chilly weather holding you back, you might not feel like you have the time to squeeze in a workout.

**It's important to stay active though. It's** a good way for you to get some alone time to recharge. It also helps you to relieve your stress. It can give you a nice mood boost too, which can help when you are feeling worn out and overwhelmed. This will allow you to better enjoy the holidays.

Even shoveling the snow off of your driveway can be a good workout. If you have kids home for the holidays and are having trouble fitting in a workout, get the whole family involved. Staying active is important, but you don't have to do the same workouts you always do. Your family might enjoy going sledding—that hike back up the hill is a good workout. You could go on a family walk, run, or bike ride.

**There are also fun runs and races during the holidays.** You could get your whole family involved in one of these events. Doing it alone is a good way to hold yourself accountable too, because you will want to train in advance.

Even if your workouts look a little bit different, it's important to stay active, even during the busiest times of the year.

# 11. STEP AWAY FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

During the holidays, it's a good time to focus on being truly present with your loved ones. With so much going on, it's hard to step away and spend time with those we truly care about. It's an important part of the holiday season though. There might be family members we don't get to see often, or maybe our kids are home from school and we want to cherish that time with them.

**To do this, it's important to step away from the distractions.** One major distraction for many people is social media. If you use social media frequently, you might find that it gets in the way of your relationships. You could take a week-long hiatus from social media or limit the amount of time you spend on social media.

Maybe instead of checking it throughout the day, you can catch up for just 30 minutes before bed. Instead of taking pictures of your get-togethers that will look good for social media, focus on taking the pictures that you want to look back on in 10 or 20 years.

**Another perk of quitting social media during the holidays** is that you will be able to stop comparing yourself and your celebration to those around you. You might feel as if everyone is doing something bigger and better than you are.

In reality, we're all doing our best and it doesn't look the same for everyone. When you stop looking at everyone else's lives, it's easier to enjoy yours and the good that you have.

## 12. SET PRIORITIES AND STICK TO THEM

With so much going on, it's hard to limit yourself. One thing you can do is set priorities for yourself. When you do this, you're giving yourself the opportunity to pick and choose what's most important to you.

At the beginning of the holiday season—or preferably before all of the madness begins—sit down and create a list of priorities. Start by making a list of all of the things you typically do during the holiday season.

**Then, start to cross off the things that are less important. Be honest with yourself. What's truly important to you?**

Maybe you go to that office party each year because you feel obligated to. But in reality, you aren't really close with anyone at your office and you don't enjoy being there. Or maybe there's a tradition your family has that isn't as important to you as it used to be.

What's important is that these are your priorities, and you are setting them for yourself. You don't have to do what everyone else is doing this holiday season.

**You staying happy and less stressed is worth more than doing this or that to please someone else.**

Once you determine what your priorities are, keep them safe. Try your best to abide by them. Maybe ask your spouse to stick with you on those priorities so you don't slip up by all of the obligations that could come up.