

Coping – Holiday Stress

10 Strategies for Coping with Holiday Stress

1. **Keep it all in perspective.** Holidays don't have to be perfect. At the end of the day, no one cares if the lights are crooked or the turkey is dry. The focus needs to be on spending time celebrating and connecting with those you love.
2. **Make space.** Make a deal with yourself to spend 15 minutes alone, without distractions, more than once a day. Do deep breathing exercises, take a walk, or listen to calming music. You don't have to be "on" all the time, and 15 minutes can actually recharge you more than you realize.
3. **Eat.** Try not to skip meals, and don't try to diet. You will just get irritable and be low on energy to handle unavoidable stress. Use moderation and don't deprive yourself. The holidays are not an excuse to throw healthy behaviors out the window, but there is nothing wrong with a cookie every now and then.
4. **Drink more water.** Stay hydrated. Alcohol is wet, but it is not hydrating and it tends to have many calories. It is also a depressant, so you will pay for whatever immediate "benefit" you have from alcohol with feeling lethargic and moody later.
5. **Sleep.** Sleep patterns tend to get thrown off when you are not on a schedule during the holidays. Try to go to sleep at a reasonable hour. Also, stay physically active, avoid electronic screens for about an hour before bedtime, and make rest a priority. Sleepy people can be stressed-out people.
6. **Exercise.** Research shows a strong link between exercise and mood. Physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed. A workout at the gym or a brisk 30-minute walk can give you time away from the chaos at home and help buffer you against stress.
7. **Stay connected.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out friends, attend religious or social events, or volunteer your time to help others. Relationships are healing, and they are one of the best methods of fighting stress.
8. **Acknowledge your feelings.** Sadness is not uncommon during the holidays due to distance from family or friends, loss of loved ones, or unexpected disappointments. Forcing yourself to be happy will only increase your sadness and build resentment. The key is to take breaks from sadness or grief. Use healthy distractions, social interaction, or be creative (e.g., writing, music, art) to express emotions in productive ways that don't drag you down and may help you sort out next steps.
9. **Keep a sense of humor.** Let yourself enjoy the moments of pleasure you experience in being among family and friends. Smile at the absurdities we human beings encounter in our efforts to connect with one another.
10. **Seek professional help.** If you experience persistent sadness or anxiety, are unable to sleep, have physical complaints, feel irritable or helpless, or lose enjoyment of and motivation to do activities, seek support from a mental health professional. You can develop a plan for facing the stress of the holidays, strengthen coping skills, and have a safe place to unload and move through whatever tensions you experience.

UFV Counselling Services

Appointments: 604 854-4528

Toll Free (Canada): 1-888-504-7441 (ext. 4254)

<http://www.ufv.ca/counselling/>

24 hour Crisis Lines available

Fraser Valley: 1-877-820-7444

Lower Mainland: 1-866-661-3311