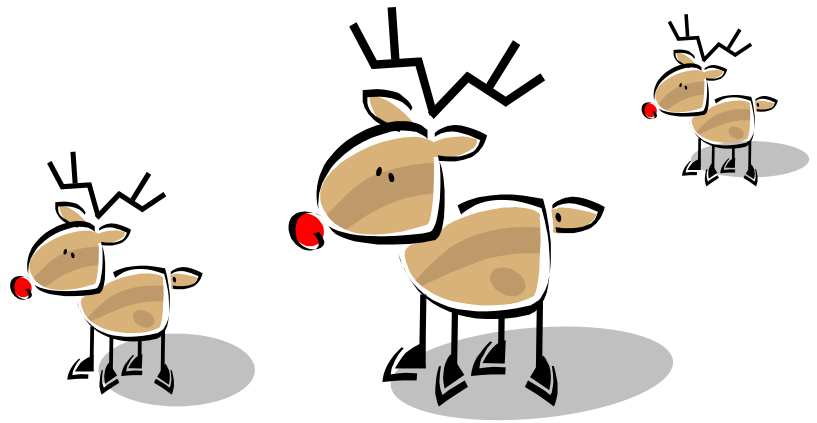


Holiday Stress



The Holidays Are Here!

More things to do, people to see, and places to go. These things might be fun, but they also can be stressful. To make this holiday season a happy and peaceful one, look for healthy ways to manage stress.

Reasonable Expectations

The media often portray the holiday season as trouble free, twinkly, and festive. But family problems may escalate when the season arrives. The reality of the holidays, much like life, is that real people and families are not perfect. If you can change your expectations just a bit so you don't expect holidays to be like the movies, you may have a more enjoyable experience.

Tips for the Holidays

Set reasonable expectations: Do your best to stick to your regular family routine. Changing your schedule to fit in holiday activities and traveling can be tough on you and your kids, so try to keep things as normal as possible.

Try to keep bedtimes and mealtimes the same even when you're away from home. Talk with your family about schedules. Take time to explain each day's activities to your children and let them know what you expect from them.

Do What You Really Want to Do

Together, choose activities that you really want to do. You can't do everything, so you might let your children pick their favorite things for your family to do. Do the things that you all will enjoy the most, and then say "no" to extra activities.

Talk with your family about finances. Even young children can learn how to budget for

gifts. Urge them to get creative and make presents for family members instead of buying them. Receiving a thoughtful gift from a child can be a memorable holiday moment that lasts a lifetime. Many families concentrate on special things they can make or do for each other. Try it!

Take Time to Relax

It is important to take time to relax this holiday season. Here are a few ways to cope with holiday stress:

Plan quiet time or at least downtime from activities. Take a few moments to read a book, take a bubble bath, or sit down and listen to your favorite songs.

You also may want to:

- Play a board game with your family.
- Go for a walk with your family to see Holiday displays in your neighborhood.
- Join your kids for fun family exercise. If you choose something outdoors, the fresh air and exercise can lift your spirits.
- Settle down for story time with your family. Pull out holiday stories that you loved as a child and read them aloud together.
- Use time spent standing in lines or sitting in traffic to take a stretch break and loosen those tense muscles. Here are some simple stretch moves: **Neck stretches:** Tilt your head toward each shoulder. Turn your head from side to side and look over your shoulder. Be sure to keep your head aligned, and do not stick your neck out. **Shoulder stretches:** Shrug your shoulders and then relax them. Roll your shoulders forward and backward. Gently shake your shoulders.

Get Giving—Volunteer at a Local Charity

Carving out a few hours to volunteer at a charity might seem impossible, but giving your time and energy may help you find the spirit of the season.

Stuck for ideas? You and your family might help wrap gifts for needy children, deliver meals to families in need, or visit residents in a local nursing home.

Just Do Your Best

As you enjoy the holiday season, do your best to limit stress. Don't expect everything to go as planned. Your child may get sick during the holiday, the oven might break as you are cooking a special dinner, or a storm may prevent relatives from visiting. When these things happen, let the family help decide on a new plan. For example, if the electricity goes out, grab your flashlights and make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Use cookie cutters to cut them into fun shapes!

Don't let unexpected events ruin the holidays for you. Be adaptable and flexible. You can help yourself and your children relax and enjoy the holidays for what they truly are: a time of joy, celebration, and peace with friends and family.

What Your EAP Can Do

You can have all the sugar plums and toy drums lined up and still discover that you are affected by the blues during the holiday season. Your employee assistance program is here to help. Perhaps you only need to talk and "process" personal concerns or work issues. Whether your problem is a real stumper or not, the EAP is here for you, both now and during any time of year.



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