

The Most Wonderful Time of the Year. Really?

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The holiday season is here. And while it's *supposed* to be a time of joy, happiness, and good cheer, for many people the days ahead can bring increased anxiety and depression, in spite of a desire on their part to join in all the fun and merriment.

With holiday activities to attend, presents to buy, and expectations placed on us by family and friends, many individuals find the hoped-for joy of the holidays escaping their grasp, and, instead of being able to take pleasure in the holidays, they find the additional stress makes it hard to enjoy them the way they'd like. For those already struggling with issues of depression, anxiety or grief, this additional stress can be particularly taxing.

If you happen to fall into this category, it's especially important to be diligent and intentional about taking care of your mental health. Here are a few suggestions for making the holidays a little more manageable – at least from a mental health standpoint.

1. **Take care of yourself physically.** You know the drill: eat right; get enough sleep; exercise. Unfortunately, during the holidays, these three activities seem to be the first go right out the window (or up the chimney!). What with eating food that's not on your diet (like all those holiday snacks and treats), an irregular sleep schedule, and disruptions to your regular exercise routine (if it even exists!), it's no wonder things get a bit off track. None-the-less, try to be conscious of the effect of *not* doing these things, and, as much as possible, try to maintain your regular routines.
2. **Pay attention to your feelings.** That means, most of all, *recognizing* that you're under stress. In other words, remember that there's a reason you're feeling anxious. This recognition alone is a huge first step toward managing your mental health during the holidays. Often, just the realization that all of the hustle and bustle is stressing you out is enough to remind you to slow down just a bit, catch your breath, and give yourself a needed break.
3. **Don't miss appointments.** During the holiday season it's easy to cancel or put off appointments with doctors and therapists until after the first of the year, but remember these visits are part of your ongoing support program, enabling you to maintain consistency regarding your mental and physical health. During times of increased stress and anxiety, it's more important than ever to keep these appointments.
4. **Take your medications as prescribed.** Medication compliance is imperative. Take your medications as prescribed – in the proper dose and at the proper time – and contact your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.
5. **Don't isolate.** When people are anxious or depressed, often they don't feel very much like being around others. This response, while understandable, is not usually helpful. If

you experience these feelings, be intentional about getting together with friends, family or co-workers. The support you gain from the company of others can help elevate your mood.

6. **Don't forget your spiritual support.** Meditation, prayer, worship, and gathering with your particular community of faith can be especially helpful for those experiencing anxiety and depression. During times of increased stress, take the time needed to draw on this form of support.

The holiday season can be particularly difficult for those struggling with mental health issues, but following these suggestions can have a positive effect. So, be intentional about setting aside time to take care of yourself. You'll notice the difference, and you'll be pleased with the results.

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