



Wellness Committee

Mindful Moment Newsletter

Managing Holiday Stress

Our October wellness newsletter dives into the holidays, which can bring joy, but also extra pressure. We are sharing quick practical tips to set boundaries, find balance, and protect your peace during the busy season.



Floridaapco.org



“ *Every struggle in your life has shaped you into the person you are today. Be thankful for the hard times, they can only make you stronger.*— Keanu Reeves

”

The Information in this newsletter was comprised using the following websites. You can find additional resources and information by visiting them.

SIMPLISH.CO

MAYOCLINIC.ORG

SOLARAMENTALHEALTH.COM

SAMSHA.GOV

APA.ORG

MCLEANHOSPITAL.ORG

IAFFRECOVERYCENTER.COM

The holiday season usually brings that undeniable holiday spirit, creative decorations, family time, and plentiful festivities. We often are surrounded by people we love or are reminded of the people or things that are no longer in our lives that may have brought meaning to the holiday season. It's important to prioritize the activities that bring us joy to balance out the busy schedule ahead.

A 2023 American Psychological Association poll found that 41% of adults' stress levels increase during the holiday season. The article, 'Mental Health and the Holidays: 9 Tips for Self-Care' from the National Council on Aging continues to state how gratitude, being realistic, and giving or serving others are among a few that contribute to benefiting one's mental wellness.

Gratitude sets the bar to motivate people to make healthier food choices. A gratitude jar where you add a thought or experience of gratitude monthly, or writing a grateful thought in a journal daily, are beneficial examples. These practices prove to reduce stress levels, improve immune systems, and enhance professional performance.

With October-January being filled with various holidays, it can be easy for time to get away from us. Being realistic with the 24 hours in a day can help with prioritizing holiday events and celebrations. It is recommended to limit each weekend to one event.

Older adults reported a positive attitude towards aging and overall health when making time for volunteering. Serving and volunteering also contribute to channeling your values or abilities. According to 'Mental Health and the Holiday Season: Embracing the Positives' from Meridian Advanced Psychiatry, baking or singing carols for others creates lasting positive memories that uplift the spirit.



According to a survey published by Healthline in 2015, 62% of people say that the holidays are "very" or "somewhat" stressful. And for good reason! The holidays pull on our time and resources, and it can often feel like we don't have enough of either to go around. The Healthline survey identifies the primary sources of holiday stress as finances (47%), healthy eating/exercise (16%), picking the "right" gift (15%), and scheduling (12%).



2,280 responses were recorded

How would you describe your stress level during the holidays? [Healthline](#)



2,280 responses were recorded

What's the greatest cause of stress during the holidays? [Healthline](#)

Contrary to popular belief, the months of November and December sport the lowest suicide rates, and that's a good thing, though depression may occur at any time of the year. Holiday depression and stress from November through New Year's can bring back painful memories, reminders of feeling alone, and not to mention the rest of the typical holiday rigmarole.

Some Noteworthy Statistics:

- 56 percent of those surveyed reported increased stress at work, but only 29 percent experienced greater stress at home.
- 38 percent said their stress levels inevitably spike during the holiday season, with the main suspects including: shortages of time and money, excessive commercialism, pressures of gift-giving, and the often stress that comes with family get-togethers.
- Most individuals surveyed spoke of high spirits, love, togetherness, and happiness, though they also complained about fatigue, sadness, irritability, and eating and drinking too much, which causes bloating.

A survey conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that 64 percent of individuals living with a mental illness reported that their conditions worsened around the holidays.

Strategies for Supporting Your Mental Health

Pay attention to your feelings

Remember that it is okay to feel unhappy during the holidays. Recognizing your feelings is the first step to addressing and nurturing them. Develop a plan for when you are feeling stressed, sad, or lonely. This plan may include calling a friend or family member, going for a walk, engaging in an activity that brings joy, or watching a favorite movie. Having a plan ahead of time can help ensure the difficult moments are more manageable.

Practice self-care

It is important to schedule time for yourself and activities that recharge your mind and body. This may include reading a good book, working out, spending time in nature, and practicing stress management skills, such as deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness. It is also important to remember to prioritize necessities, including eating a balanced diet, getting plenty of sleep, and finding time for exercise.

Connect with community

If you can't be near loved ones during the holidays, finding a supportive community through clubs, support groups, community centers, local meetups, and faith communities can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Consider scheduling a regular phone call with family and friends as well.

Support others

During this time of year feelings of grief and loss can amplify. Check in on loved ones who may be alone or struggling during the holiday season. Helping a friend or neighbor not only gives joy to others, but it can improve your own happiness and well-being.

Recognize seasonal mood changes

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a condition in which people experience symptoms of depression that are triggered by the change in seasons as the days get shorter. While this form of depression often improves in the spring and summer, it is important to talk with your health care provider if you feel you are experiencing these symptoms. Treatment is effective and may include light therapy, antidepressant medication, and/or talk therapy.

Avoid alcohol and drugs

For people in recovery, the holiday season presents challenges that can trigger the use of alcohol and drugs. Having a plan for navigating social events and feelings of loneliness, can reduce the risk of substance use. For family and friends, it is important to check in on those who may be struggling with substance use over the holidays.

Know when to seek help

If you feel that your mental health struggles are becoming overwhelming and difficult to handle, it is important to seek help and know that treatment is available.

6 Signs You May Be Struggling Around the Holidays



1. You're Lacking the "Holiday Spirit"

Being surrounded by cheeriness can be stigmatizing when you don't feel the same level of enthusiasm as others. The pressure to be social, happy, and present can make it difficult to speak up if you feel otherwise. You may also feel left out if your spiritual traditions aren't the dominant ones on display this time of year.

What You Can Do About It

Recognize that you don't need to force yourself to be happy and that it's good to acknowledge feelings that aren't joyful; remember that you are not alone in feeling this way. Avoid numbing or avoiding feelings by using alcohol or other substances, which worsen anxiety and depression. If possible, surround yourself with people who feel similarly; celebrate your traditions or create new ones.

2. You're Overwhelmed by Grief and Loss

If you are living with grief, loss, trauma, or loneliness, it can be easy to compare your situation to others', which can increase feelings of loneliness or sadness. Take time to check in with yourself and your feelings and have realistic expectations for how the holiday season will be. If you are dealing with loss or grief, gently remind yourself that as circumstances change, traditions will change as well.

What You Can Do About It

If holiday observances seem inauthentic right now, you do not need to force yourself to celebrate. During this time, connect with and plan to check in with a support group, a therapist, a faith community, or friends who understand. As much as possible, let your loved ones know how they can support you, whether it's helping you with shopping or meeting up for a regular walk. Often, people want to help but don't know what to say or where to start.

3. You're Feeling Pressured to Participate in Activities—and Want No Part of Them

We all have our own personal history with holidays. We dream about the ways the holidays are supposed to be, which can be a dangerous perspective. We get caught up in wanting to do it all, but we can aim to set more realistic expectations for ourselves and others.

What You Can Do About It

Accept your limitations and be patient with others, too. Try to see others' points of view and recognize that we're all feeling at least a little stressed. Prioritize the most important activities or schedule get-togethers for after the holidays: If you feel overwhelmed by social obligations and what others are asking of you, learn how to be comfortable saying "no". Expectations to celebrate holidays in a specific way can bring up old trauma or family conflicts; for self-care, consider outlining your plan for the season. Speaking of self-care, create a schedule for when you will do your shopping, baking, and cleaning—and be sure to schedule time for yourself. You may choose not to celebrate at all—instead of spending the holidays the way you think you should, you might opt for an activity you actually feel like doing—whether it's making a favorite dish or having a Netflix marathon. Regardless of your plans, it can be helpful to communicate intentions to friends and family early in the holiday season so everyone knows what to expect

4. You're Stressed About Giving Gifts

According to McLean's Mark Longsjo, LICSW, it's very common to get caught up in the commercialization and marketing of the holidays. We can feel stressed about spending on a strained budget or trying to find just the right gift. "Advertisers will take advantage of our susceptibility," Longsjo says, "but we have the ability to put it in perspective and remind ourselves that we are the ones creating that anxiety, and we are the ones who can reduce it." Giving to others is not about spending money. And of course, what goes along with setting realistic expectations is maintaining a budget and being transparent.

What You Can Do About It

Consider how much money you can comfortably spend and stick to the amount. If purchasing gifts for everyone is difficult, consider having a Secret Santa or White Elephant exchange to reduce the number of items everyone needs to buy. You can also simply let people know you are unable to give gifts this year.

"It's an old adage, but sometimes personal gifts—like a poem, short story, or framed photo—are the best ones," Longsjo says.

You can also give the gift of helping a neighbor, a friend, a family member, or a stranger. It's the act of giving that is more important than a present. Our generosity can be a gift to ourselves, because when we focus on others and less on ourselves, we tend to reduce our anxiety.

5. There's Not Much Sunlight at All, and It's Affecting Your Mood

In the northern hemisphere, the holidays coincide with winter's lack of available sunlight. Less exposure to natural light can lead to new or increased symptoms of depression.

What You Can Do About It

Try to get as much sunlight as possible. To boost your mood and regulate sleep, schedule outdoor exercise in the middle of the day when the sun is brightest. If you can, work near a window throughout the day. Even outfitting your home with warm, bright lighting can help improve your mood. Many traditions this time of year incorporate candles and twinkling lights for a reason. If you feel the need to slow your pace and hunker down this time of year, consider reframing the winter months as an opportunity to work on "quieter" projects and activities suited for the indoors, such as writing, knitting, or taking online courses.

6. You're Alone or Feeling Isolated

While it's true that many of us have friends and family to connect with during the holiday season, there's also the danger of becoming isolated. If you are predisposed to depression or anxiety, it can be especially hard to reach out to others.

What To Do About It

Remind yourself of the people, places, and things that make you feel happy. Consider scheduling a regular call or video chat with friends on a weekly or biweekly basis so you don't have to think twice about making the effort. Take advantage of other ways to connect, including sending out holiday cards and communicating with family and friends by phone, text, email, and social media. Calming activities, such as reading, meditating, and gratitude journaling, can be helpful if you don't feel comfortable in social situations. Don't forget about self-care. We know the importance of a balanced diet, moderate exercise, and plenty of sleep, but because there are so many distractions and stressors this time of year, we lose sight of some of the basic necessities. We need to take care of ourselves and pay increased attention to ensuring we fulfill these areas of our lives as we get closer to the holidays.



Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D)

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that's related to changes in seasons — SAD begins and ends at about the same times every year. If you're like most people with SAD, your symptoms start in the fall and continue into the winter months, sapping your energy and making you feel moody. These symptoms often resolve during the spring and summer months. Less often, SAD causes depression in the spring or early summer and resolves during the fall or winter months.

According to researchers, the percentage of people in the United States who struggle with SAD ranges from 1.5% in southern Florida to 9% in northern states.

If you feel hopeless, have suicidal thoughts, or experience changes in appetite and sleep patterns, talk to your doctor. Effective treatments for SAD include light therapy, talk therapy, and medication.

Signs and symptoms of SAD may include:

- Feeling listless, sad, or down most of the day, nearly every day
- Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Having low energy and feeling sluggish
- Having problems with sleeping too much
- Experiencing carbohydrate cravings, overeating and weight gain
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling hopeless, worthless or guilty
- Having thoughts of not wanting to live

Fall and winter SAD

- Oversleeping
- Appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates
- Weight gain
- Tiredness or low energy

Spring and summer SAD

- Trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- Poor appetite
- Weight loss
- Agitation or anxiety
- Increased irritability



Holiday Stress & Wellness (for First Responders)

Why the holidays feel heavy: 80% of people report higher stress. For first responders, seasonal call types (fires, suicides, burglaries), shift work, and missed family time add extra load.

Grief shows up—even years later:

- You don't "get over" loss; you learn to live with it.
- Generalized grief = waves of emotion, some good days.
- Complicated grief = daily persistent despair, isolation, loss of functioning, and suicidal thoughts—this needs professional support.

Plan for grief during the season: Acknowledge the holidays will be different, create new/temporary traditions, protect your limited energy, expect mixed emotions, talk it out (don't bottle it), and include loved ones' memories in meaningful ways.

Holiday-stress symptoms to watch: Low mood/anxiety, headaches/body aches, sleep changes, fatigue, irritability. Red flags: hopelessness/worthlessness, extreme isolation, reckless behavior, big mood swings, and any decline in daily functioning → reach out.

Healthy-habits guardrails:

- Make a simple plan early (meals, gifts, schedule).
- Set clear boundaries—quality over quantity.
- Mindful eating & portion control keep moving (walks, stretching, yoga).
- Prioritize sleep (aim ~7 hours; short naps help).
- If you're in recovery, line up sober supports and extra check-ins.

Family & tough conversations: Lead with empathy, focus on common ground, breathe before reacting, and remember most people are stressed too.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD): A real, time-limited subtype of depression linked to reduced daylight (sleep/appetite changes, carb cravings, heaviness, irritability). Supports include light therapy, therapy, exercise, routine sleep, nutrient-dense meals, and (if appropriate) Vitamin D—consult your clinician.

Coping with the "holiday blues": Name your feelings, avoid isolation, keep a simple routine, say "no" when needed, move your body daily, practice altruism/volunteering, moderate substances, and anchor attention to the present (not past regrets or future what-ifs).



"It's hard to be jolly when you have to work on Christmas!"

STOP HOLIDAY STRESS BEFORE IT STARTS BY:



Cherishing old traditions
& introducing new ones

Making realistic expectations

Maintaining
or improving
mental
well-being



Delegating tasks



Setting a budget & sticking to it



Practicing gratitude
& focusing on what
really matters

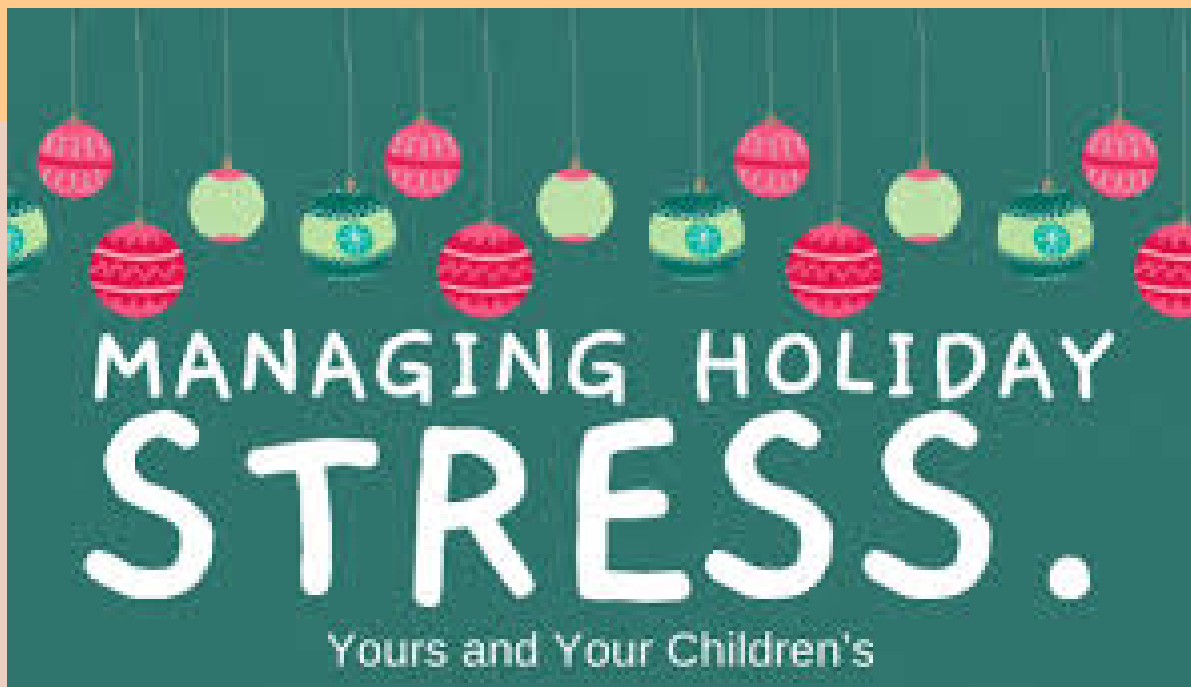


Shopping little by little



Making time for self-care





FOR MANY OF US, THE HOLIDAY SEASON CAN BRING AN INCREASED SENSE OF FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY AND, ALONG WITH IT, ADDITIONAL FEELINGS OF STRESS. ADVERTISEMENTS ABOUT THE JOYS OF THE SEASON CAN SEEM LOST ON US AS WE SCURRY AROUND TRYING TO DO EVEN MORE THAN USUAL. IT'S EASY TO FEEL OVERWHELMED.



Tips to Help Parents Effectively Manage Holiday Stress

Strengthen social connections We know that strong, supportive relationships help us manage all kinds of challenges. So, we can view the holidays as a time to reconnect with the positive people in our lives. Accepting help and support from those who care about us can help alleviate stress. Also, volunteering at a local charity on our own or with family can be another way to make connections; helping others often makes us feel better, too.

Initiate conversations about the season It can be helpful to have conversations with our kids about the variety of different holiday traditions our families, friends and others may celebrate. Parents can use this time as an opportunity to discuss how some families may not participate in the same holiday traditions as others. Not everyone needs to be the same. It is important to teach open-mindedness about others and their celebrations.

Set expectations It is helpful to set realistic expectations for gifts and holiday activities. Depending on a child's age, we can use this opportunity to teach kids about the value of money and responsible spending. We need to remember to pare down our own expectations, too. Instead of trying to take on everything, we need to identify the most important holiday tasks and take small concrete steps to accomplish them.

Keep things in perspective On the whole, the holiday season is short. It helps to maintain a broader context and a longer-term perspective. We can ask ourselves, what's the worst thing that could happen this holiday? Our greatest fears may not happen and, if they do, we can tap our strengths and the help of others to manage them. There will be time after the holiday season to follow up or do more of things we've overlooked or did not have the time to do during the holidays.

Take care of yourself It is important that we pay attention to our own needs and feelings during the holiday season. We can find fun, enjoyable and relaxing activities for ourselves and our families. By keeping our minds and bodies healthy, we are primed to deal with stressful situations when they arise. Consider cutting back television viewing for kids and getting the family out together for fresh air and a winter walk. Physical activity can help us feel better and sleep well, while reducing sedentary time and possible exposure to stress-inducing advertisements.



Ashwagandha Hot Cocoa

- ½ tsp ashwagandha root powder (*Withania somnifera*)
- 1 tsp unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 cup warm milk of choice (I use almond milk)
- Dash of cinnamon, nutmeg or both
- Sweeten lightly, if you like (I always add marshmallows)
- Optional: whipped cream for a special treat and kids like it too!

In a small pot, whisk together. Warm it up just before the boiling point (don't boil). Add to mug and sip slowly about an hour before bed.

Safety Notes: Ashwagandha isn't for everyone. Skip it if you're pregnant, nursing or managing thyroid issues, and always check with your healthcare provider if you're on medication. Cocoa, of course, has some natural caffeine, but it's minimal in a small amount like this.



AUTUMN

Mindfulness Bingo



Journal how your body feels right now	Drink tea or cocoa slowly, noticing every flavor	Do a mindful 10-minute stretch with no distractions	Take a slow walk and notice five fall colors	Press leaves and observe their shapes and veins
Sit in silence outdoors for 10 minutes	Reflect on a favorite autumn memory and sit with it	Smell the crisp air and describe it to yourself	Feel the texture of a leaf or acorn—really examine it	Write about what “stillness” means to you
Listen to soothing music with eyes closed	Practice mindful coloring with autumn hues		Do mindful breathing while sitting on a park bench	Fold laundry or wash dishes slowly and mindfully
Try a fall scent (cinnamon, clove, cedar) and breathe deeply	Go barefoot in grass (or indoors if it's chilly!)	Watch the clouds move without checking your phone	Bake something slowly, savoring each step and smell	Observe an animal or bird quietly for a few minutes
Say one kind thing to yourself in the mirror	Listen to the sound of wind in the trees	Create a gratitude collage or list	Decorate one corner of your space with intention	Journal about something you're ready to let go of

YOUR AUTUMN MIINDFULNESS REWARD

Complete one row: _____

Complete two rows: _____

Complete three rows: _____

Complete the entire card: _____

AUTUMN

Mindfulness Bingo



YOUR AUTUMN MINDFULNESS REWARD

Complete one row: _____

Complete two rows: _____

Complete three rows: _____

Complete the entire card: _____

☐ DRINK PUMPKIN SPICE LATTE	☐ GET LOST IN CORN MAZE
☐ CARVE A PUMPKIN	☐ MAKE PUMPKIN SOUP
☐ GET READY FOR HALLOWEEN	☐ READ A BOOK
☐ GO APPLE PICKING	☐ PUT ON A COZY SWEATER
☐ DECORATE THE FRONT DOOR	☐ WEAR FUZZY SOCKS
☐ WATCH A SCARY MOVIE	☐ MAKE AN APPLE PIE
☐ LIGHT SCENTED CANDLES	☐ MAKE A BONFIRE
☐ GO TO THE PUMPKIN PATCH	☐ TRICK OR TREAT
☐ JUMP IN A PILE OF LEAVES	☐ VISIT FRIENDS OR FAMILY
☐ DRINK HOT APPLE CIDER	☐ BE THANKFUL

