



## How to Stress Less During the Holidays

The holidays should be a time of joy, happiness, and relaxation, as many people take a break from work and spend time with loved ones. But Americans are five times more likely to say their stress level increases rather than decreases during the holidays, according to the American Psychiatric Association.<sup>1</sup>

Stress makes you feel bad, but what's worse, it can compromise your health. If you're already worrying about the holidays, learn how to keep your stress in check so you can ring in the season with cheer.

### The Effects of Stress

Everyone is familiar with the signs of psychological stress or anxiety. Your heart races, and your breathing becomes faster and shallower. Your hands or muscles shake. You might have a nervous stomach.

Those physical symptoms happen because of your body's stress response (also known as the fight or flight response). You release hormones like adrenaline and cortisol when your brain senses danger. These cause a chain of reactions that increase your blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing, allowing you to escape the threat.

Your body can handle small amounts of stress occasionally. It's beneficial as it helps keep you alert and out of harm's way. But when stress is chronic — as it is for many people when you worry about things like money, family issues, or how you'll get through the holidays, it may become unhealthy.

Over time, stress can impact your heart and metabolic health, and immune system.<sup>2</sup> Chronic psychological stress also affects your digestive health. Not only are you more likely to experience GI problems, but also, stress affects the health and diversity of your microbiome.<sup>2,3</sup>

If you're feeling extra stressed during the holidays, these tips can help.

### Set Boundaries

Many people set the bar impossibly high during the holidays. It's normal to want a picture-perfect holiday with delicious food, an abundance of gifts, and relatives who all get along. But it's unrealistic to expect it.

This year, try to get back to basics. Focus on the meaning of the holidays and scale back food, gifts, guest list, or whatever brings you stress. Set a budget for gifts and food and stick to it. Draw names for a gift swap instead of buying a gift for every friend or relative. Ask for help as much as possible. A potluck dinner or cookie swap is as enjoyable as doing all the cooking or baking yourself — but it's far less stressful.

## Manage Your Time

It's normal to feel stressed when you try to pack too many social engagements into a few short weeks, yet most of us do it year after year. This year, consider your time and energy, and don't be afraid to say no if the thought of one more gathering feels overwhelming. Or, instead of squeezing everything in between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, suggest an "after-the-holidays" party to catch up with friends and family in January.

If you have a busy schedule, do your best to stay organized by making a to-do list. You'll feel a sense of accomplishment as you cross things off the list. Keeping a list can also help you work ahead, so you're not caught playing catch-up at the last minute.

If you are hosting a dinner, a party, or house guests, try to get your home in order ahead of time. Decorate and shop for groceries or essentials early. Keep as much as possible in your freezer or pantry, so you'll only need to shop for perishable items before your guests arrive.

And don't be afraid to take shortcuts to help you save time and energy. If you have the budget, consider hiring someone to help with house cleaning or window washing. Instead of shopping and baking, buy frozen desserts or appetizers you can reheat and serve.

## Prioritize Self-Care

It's all too easy to focus on others and forget about your own health and well-being during the holidays. But this time of year, more than ever, it's essential to listen to your body and mind and give them the care they deserve.

Try to build in some time for self-care activities each week. Treat this time like you would any other appointment and clear your calendar to:

- Exercise at the gym or go for a walk or hike in nature.
- Meditate, stretch, or do yoga at home or in a class.
- Perform focused, slow, deep breathing exercises.
- Get a massage.
- Take a hot bath.
- Read a good book.

Sleep is also crucial to self-care and a healthy lifestyle, but it's easy to neglect it when you're busy and stressed. Poor sleep impacts hormones, blood pressure, blood sugar, and gut health, so it has wide-reaching negative effects throughout your body.

Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night. To tap into your body's natural sleep-wake schedule, try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. And make sure you turn off your phone, computer, or television at least 30 minutes before bedtime to help you fall asleep faster.

## Nourish Your Body

Celebrating the holidays with special foods and beverages is a treat, but it's also easy to go overboard. Too much sugar and alcohol, too many rich foods, and insufficient fiber can affect your digestion. These can also compromise your gut and immune health, and leave you several pounds heavier come January.

Make sure you nourish your body by eating healthy food first. Fill up on a few extra servings of fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds before you hit the treats. Those healthy, high-fiber foods will help fill you and make it easier to say “no thanks” to an extra cookie or slice of pie. Whole plant foods also contain essential vitamins and minerals that nourish and support your immune system to help keep you healthy.

You can also consider adding some immune support supplements and probiotics to your routine. During the holidays, when you're in close quarters with cold and flu germs, these can give your immune system some extra support.

The holiday season always brings a whirlwind of activities, emotions, and stress. Learn to recognize your stress triggers so you can head them off before they get out of hand. The best way to reduce holiday stress is focusing on moderation and on the things that matter the most, like enjoying time and making memories with your family and friends.

For additional ways to help keep stress in check, try [Calm Support](#). Calm Support is a plant-based formula designed to help the nervous system relax and moderate occasional stress with a combination of two patented stress management ingredients. Relora® has been shown to help diminish stress-related sugar cravings and promote relaxation while being non-sedating.<sup>†</sup> Sensoril® is a proprietary Ashwagandha extract designed to moderate occasional stress.

## REFERENCES

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