



Stress Management over the Holidays



acaciaEAP
employee assistance program

The holiday season is meant to be a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness. Yet, the increased social activity and traditions can also add to our stress levels.

The pressure of gift-giving, the stress of having social events to host or attend, and the challenges of taking part in family obligations (which can be difficult even if you get along with your family members), can produce a range of difficult feelings, such as anxiety, irritation, and frustration.

This is why we have compiled some thoughts and suggestions to help you navigate this time as best you can.

Plan Ahead

Start your holiday preparations early to avoid last-minute rushes. Create a list of tasks, including shopping, decorating, and meal planning. By spreading out these tasks over several weeks, you can reduce the pressure and enjoy the holiday season at a more leisurely pace.

Budget Wisely

Financial stress is a common trigger during the holidays. Establish a realistic budget for gifts, decorations, and food, and stick to it. Consider homemade gifts or experiences that are thoughtful but won't break the bank. Remember the value of a gift is in the sentiment rather than the price tag.

Delegate Tasks

You don't have to do everything yourself. Delegate tasks to family members and friends, whether it's cooking, decorating, or planning activities. Doing this not only lightens your load but fosters a sense of togetherness and partnership.

Create Boundaries

Set boundaries around your festive celebrations. This includes saying "no" to invitations or additional responsibilities when you feel overwhelmed. It may help to establish beforehand, based on prior experience, what your limits are in terms of committing yourself. Communicate those limits kindly but clearly to others.

Step Away

One benefit of the holiday season is the number of public holidays that come with it. Seize this opportunity to disengage from work by making sure you turn on automated out-of-office responses and turn off any work-related notifications.

Take Time for Yourself

By implementing the above points, you will create time that you can put towards self-care. Self-care can mean different things to different people. Consider what activities make you feel joyful, nurtured, or at peace, and schedule them into your calendar. That may mean exercising, reading a new book, or going for a massage.

Set Realistic Expectations

It's important to recognise that perfection is not achievable, and pursuing it can lead to frustration and disappointment. Not everything will go as planned; imperfections are what make us human, plus they add flavour to what otherwise would be a predictable life.

Breathe

When we're experiencing stressful times, our breathing can become shallow. Shallow breathing can cause negative effects on our bodies, including headaches, increased heart rate, and neck pain.

By breathing deeply into our diaphragm (a large muscle that separates the chest and abdomen), we can activate our parasympathetic nervous system. This part of our nervous system promotes relaxation

To do this, place one hand on your chest and one on your belly. Take a deep breath in, all the way to the bottom of your lungs, making the hand on your belly move up, while the hand on your chest stays relatively still. Then breathe out, clearing the lungs and making the hand on your belly return to its original position. Continue this for several minutes.



Don't Throw All Caution in the Wind

It can be tempting to go all out during the holidays and overindulge in festive treats. Although it's perfectly fine to let go a bit, avoid taking it to a point where you regret it later. Before attending a celebration, consider your approach to food and alcohol that will allow you to have a good time both now and afterwards.

Reach Out to a Professional

If the suggestions above are not helpful and you are feeling overwhelmed, consult with a mental health professional. Mental health professionals can help you adjust your goals and expectations so they are attainable. They can also help you address any unhelpful thoughts or behaviours that are getting in the way of experiencing a peaceful holiday season.

At Acacia, we have a range of qualified and experienced EAP Professionals available 24/7 through the holiday season who can provide counselling and mental health support.

Final Words

Managing stress during the holiday season is crucial for a joyous celebration. With the pressure of gift-giving, social gatherings, and heightened expectations, it's essential to prioritise yourself and manage your stress accordingly.