

Texas Department of State Health Services

# Tips to Reduce Stress this Holiday Season

While the holiday season may be “the most wonderful time of the year,” it is also a time of frantic activity, financial and family stress, and memories both good and bad. Face it – many find this the season to be stressful, but there are steps you can take to maximize the positives and minimize the negatives. Here are a few strategies to consider to avoid holiday stress:

**Set Realistic Expectations and Plans:**

Stress is an emotional reaction to circumstances where we feel we have lost control. The key to avoiding stress is to keep things simple and manage expectations. The holidays don't have to be perfect. Be prepared for setbacks – pies might burn or plans might change at the last minute – and try to take them in stride.

**Finances:** Polls indicate that money is the number one cause of stress. Set realistic spending goals and stick to them. Avoid applying for department store credit cards; paying off high credit-card bills could extend your holiday stress well into next year. Find activities that are free or don't break your budget, such as driving around to look at holiday decorations or going window shopping. Be creative with your gift-giving – remember it's the thought that counts.

**Relationships:** The holidays can heighten tension with family and friends. Be gracious with each other. You'll be happier with yourself if you show positive behavior and attitude. Greater harmony might depend on your ability to just let some things slide and focus on the positives. As families change or grow, traditions often change, too. Be open to creating new ones.

**Physical Health:** The strain of working, shopping, attending social functions, entertaining, and over-indulging in food and

drink can take a toll on our bodies. Make time in your holiday schedule to exercise, and be sure to drink plenty of water and get a good night's rest. It's easy to let the pace of the season wear down your immune system. After all, flu season is upon us (and don't forget to get vaccinated!).

**Emotional Health:** Be in the present. Take some time to meditate, pray, or slow down in your own way. Appreciate small moments and focus on what you're thankful for. Let others share holiday responsibilities, like planning, cooking, or shopping. Give yourself permission to not think about the rude driver from this morning or work deadlines – worries of the job will patiently await your return.

**Self-Care:** If you're alone or have limited family support, say “yes” to one of those invitations to a holiday celebration or treat yourself to a special meal or indulgence. Spend time with friends and stay in touch with extended family members. Go somewhere where there is an opportunity to celebrate with others and reach out to new people, such as your place of worship or a community event.

**Travel:** Whether traveling by car or plane, build in extra time in case of delays or other difficulties. That way, you might be more prepared when challenges happen. If traveling by plane, check airport websites for the latest information that might affect your flight.

**You Don't Have to Go It Alone:** If the holidays are triggering moderate to significant depression or anxiety for you, contact your physician for appropriate referrals to mental health treatment. You can also dial 2-1-1 for mental health resources near you or visit [MentalHealthTX.org](http://MentalHealthTX.org).



Have a happy and healthy holiday season!