
HOLIDAY SURVIVAL TIPS

“I have come to believe that caring for myself is not self-indulgent. Caring for myself is an act of survival.”

~ Audrey Lorde

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The holiday season, generally from October to January, is traditionally seen as the most festive, best time of the year. We all have memories (hopefully positive) of holidays past with friends and family. But doesn't it seem like the holiday seasons have become busier and more stressful? That's because they have. Although it's not actually the holidays themselves that are more stressful, it's our lives that are busier and more anxiety producing. In addition, the holiday season creates diverse responses in people. For some people, this is cause for excitement. For others, it can bring up anxiety, depression, or a feeling of being overwhelmed. As a society, we view the holiday season as a joyous time. On an individual basis, however, many factors play a role in creating a "less than joyous" time of year. One factor is memory. If we've had disappointing holidays in the past, our anticipation of this year's festivities could be less than stellar. The ups and downs of the previous

year can also play a role in our reaction. Loss of a loved one, divorce/separation, financial stress, moving, and physical illness are among the most stressful experiences we can have. If you have experienced one or more of these in the past year, your nervous system might be overwhelmed by the intensity of the holiday season. In addition, our everyday stressors (such as working long hours, paying bills, and fighting traffic) are compounded this time of year with tasks such as shopping for gifts and special meals, cleaning the house, putting up the holiday decorations, making travel plans, packing for travel, and actually traveling. Any added responsibility to our already overloaded plate can impact our mental, emotional, and physical health. What's the solution?



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Find some inner peace this season.

1. **Lower your expectations or get rid of them altogether.** When we have rigid expectations of how things “should” go, we are almost always let down. Don’t sabotage this holiday season by setting unrealistic goals for yourself or anyone else.
2. **Don’t underestimate the time it will take to complete holiday tasks.** Rather than creating situations where you are running around like a “chicken with its head cut off” because you double-booked your time, create a timeline for all the things you need to accomplish. Add at least 30-60 minutes to each one.
3. **Remind yourself to SLOW DOWN.** When you find your mind or body racing around, or if you feel yourself becoming agitated, angry, or overwhelmed, remember to breathe. Stress creates chemicals in the body that cloud rational thought and decision making. Remind yourself that everything will get done, and everything will be okay.
4. **Keep up your self-care!** Generally speaking, when we are busy and stressed out, we start neglecting the very tools that help us get through stressful times unscathed: getting enough sleep, eating regularly, drinking enough water, and exercising. These practices seem so simple, but they can have profoundly positive results; during the holiday season, it just takes a little extra discipline and self-care to do them!

The holiday season will be whatever you make of it, so take time before the “going gets rough” to decide how you want to feel this year. While we can’t control external events or the environments we are in, we can control our inner world; use your inner resources to have the type of holiday season you want to have. ●

Sarah Myers, Esq., LMFT, LAC, is the Executive Director of the Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP). COLAP is the free, confidential and independent well-being program for the legal community of Colorado. For more information, go to www.coloradolap.org. For a confidential consultation, discussion about your stressors, or to obtain helpful resources, contact COLAP at 303-986-3345 or info@coloradolap.org.