



THE EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

Public Employee Benefits Alliance

HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

DEC.
18

December Online Seminar

*Say What You Mean the Right Way:
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Keeping Holiday Stress at Bay

Some people look forward to the holidays all year, while others see the holiday season approaching and are overcome by a sense of dread. Will life become so hectic that I can't enjoy the holidays? How will I buy what I need to buy and not overspend again this year? How will I ever get everything done that I need to do? How many pounds will I gain this year? Will the family get along? The list could go on and on, but all these questions, if left unaddressed, lead to the same thing: stress! Try these tips for managing the stress that seems to be built into the holiday season.

SET PRIORITIES.

People tend to get wrapped up in trying to create perfection at this time of the year. Set reasonable goals for what you will do to celebrate. Decide in advance what is most important to you and your family, and focus your celebrations around those things. Try to avoid replicating everything your parents did when you were young. Hang on to meaningful traditions, but avoid doing something solely because it is what your mom or dad did. Don't overschedule! Both you and your kids need downtime to enjoy this special time of the year. Be careful to choose activities based on what you want to do rather than what you think you *must* do.

MAKE A PLAN.

Once you have decided what your priorities are for holiday celebrations, plan how you will organize yourself to get the important work done. Make a calendar and include all important dates on it (the school play, the neighbor's open house, the drive through the neighborhood to enjoy the holiday decorations, and so on). You may even want to schedule time for any shopping, decorating, baking, writing cards, or other holiday traditions that you have decided will be part of your holiday. Carefully plan your menus, and do your shopping in an organized fashion, with a list. You will be much less likely to forget important ingredients and will eliminate the last-minute running that leaves you exhausted and frazzled.

KEEP EXPECTATIONS REALISTIC.

It is not your responsibility to be sure that everybody has a perfect holiday, so don't put that demand on yourself. Holiday joy is something that comes from within a person—you cannot create something that is not there.

MAKE A BUDGET AND KEEP IT.

If gift buying is part of your holiday celebration, decide in advance what you can afford to spend this year. Create a list of all the people you will shop for, and allocate a portion of your total holiday budget to each person. That is the easy part—the hard part is sticking to the budget you create! Try to think of less expensive gift options—a baking mix, a nicely framed photograph of a shared memory, or the gift of your time. Overspending during the holidays is a major source of stress, so be careful. Remember that all the gifts in the world cannot buy happiness.

CARE FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY.

During the holidays, when stress can really take its toll, people tend to neglect doing those things that reduce stress. You may overindulge in food and drink, and leave such things as rest, relaxation, and exercise out of your daily life. Make it a goal to change that this holiday season. Be realistic about the types and amounts of foods you choose. Avoid sugary and fat-laden snacks that may give you a quick boost but will be followed by a drop in energy. Get outside for a brisk walk, and take the kids. Think about what is causing your stress, and make a plan to change the pressures you may be putting on yourself.

Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). Keeping holiday stress at bay. Raleigh, NC: Author.

Helpful Hints for Healthy Holiday Eating

It's that time of year again. Holiday parties and family gatherings can present a special challenge when it comes to eating healthily—especially for people who are trying to prevent or control diabetes. The key to a diabetes friendly gathering is having a variety of healthy food selections, and this doesn't mean that you'll have to completely sacrifice all of your favorites!

The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) has a few tips to help you stay healthy and enjoy the holidays:

- **Eat a healthy snack before leaving home.** This will reduce the risk of overeating at the party.
- **Go to the party with a plan.** Check out the buffet first, and then decide what and how much you will eat. The foods you select should fit into your meal plan.
- **Bring a dish.** Contribute your favorite healthy dish to the holiday buffet.
- **Savor every bite.** Eating slowly reduces your chances of eating too much.
- **Drink water.** Water is a healthy, no-calorie beverage (compared to 1 cup of eggnog that has 342 calories!).
- **Trim the fat from the meat.** Each tablespoon of fat you trim off contains 100 calories.
- **Be the life of the party.** Stay active by focusing on party activities instead of the buffet table.

If you're throwing the party, here are a few additional ways to be a healthy holiday host:

- **Offer a variety of low-fat, high-fiber foods.** There are lots of healthier options; consider fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, grilled or broiled lean meats, fish, turkey, and chicken without the skin. Reduce the use of mayonnaise, oil, and butter. Increase fiber with whole-grain breads, peas, and beans.
- **Serve healthy alternatives to traditional holiday dishes.** Transform traditionally high-fat and high-calorie foods into low-fat, healthier versions. You can use nonfat or 1% milk instead of whole milk or cream. Try to bake or broil foods when possible instead of frying. Skip cream cheese and try low-fat cottage cheese or plain yogurt.
- **Be a support system for your family members and friends.** If you see them slipping, keep encouraging them to eat healthily during the holiday season, and throughout the year.

To find out more about preventing and controlling diabetes, visit the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDKD) website at <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-communication-programs/ndep/Pages/index.aspx>.

Source: National Diabetes Education Program. (Revised 2016, June 7 [Ed.]). Helpful hints for healthy holiday eating (B. Schuette, Ed.). Retrieved June 7, 2016, from http://www.ndep.nih.gov/media/Healthy_Holiday_Eating.pdf

Fighting Depression Around the Holidays

As the holidays approach and another year comes to an end, many enter a period of reflection. Reflection can offer an opportunity to revel in the many exciting events of the year, or it can cause us to be consumed with self-doubt and regret. Instead of focusing on the promotions, new friends, and exciting vacations, for example, people remember all of things they had hoped to accomplish—losing weight, going back to school, learning to cook—the list can be endless and overwhelming. Fortunately, however, the challenges that come with managing depression during the holidays are not impossible.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Identify the issue. While the signs and symptoms of depression can vary, there are some hallmarks that can alert you or those around you that you may be feeling a bit down.

- Fatigue
- Eating more or less
- Sleeping more or less
- Inability to concentrate
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Depressed mood most of the time
- Lack of interest in activities that you used to enjoy

One of the most important factors in identifying these changes is self-awareness. Do yourself a favor and take note of how you generally live your life. Do you get together with friends on a weekly basis, enjoy hiking, or go to the gym often? If you wake up one day in December and have a difficult time remembering the last time you did any of these, it might be a sign that you are not acting or feeling like yourself.

PREVENTING DEPRESSION

Depression is not impossible to overcome, but why fight an unnecessary battle? If you know that you might be prone to feeling a little down during this holiday season, plan your preemptive attack now!

Create a plan for your holiday.

Goals give you something to focus on and preoccupy your mind. So fill your mind with something exciting and productive this holiday. Not into the holiday jingles and twinkling lights? Dedicate a portion of your time to volunteer work or commit to catching up with old friends, and be accountable. Make some phone calls early in the season and get these appointments on your calendar. Who has time to think about the forgotten New Year's resolution when there are smiling children to read to or meals to be had with old friends?

Create new traditions.

Is this your first holiday away from your family who live in another state? If so, change your focus from longing for holidays past to designing the footprint for your very own holiday traditions. Print up some nice invitations for your first annual holiday party, or book your first of many holiday vacations. Whatever you decide to do, take ownership and control over how your valuable downtime is spent.



FINDING SOLUTIONS

When you realize that a depressed mood has crept into your life, take action sooner rather than later. Remember that depressive symptoms have a tendency to increase in intensity—as do their impact on your mood, activity level, and motivation. Waiting until later may mean that you have less energy and motivation to tackle the weight of your emotions.

Regroup and reorganize.

When you realize that something has gone awry, develop a new game plan. Take a step back from all of your commitments and responsibilities, and evaluate what has changed in your life. Have you taken on too many tasks? Have you forgotten your goals and aspirations? Have you lost touch with the friends and family members who keep you grounded? Make a list of what is lacking in your life and what may need to be cut.

Utilize your resources.

Many companies offer their employees access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). In addition to providing counseling services, EAPs often provide other services, like help with locating child care or elder care services, providing legal advice, offering financial planning, and research help to assist with some of the things on your to-do list. It is sometimes difficult to ask for help, but the result can be worthwhile.

Be kind to yourself.

The holiday season often reminds people to be nice and generous to others, but it is also important for you to be kind to yourself. Remember that variations in your mood are a part of being human, and getting back on track takes time. If you find yourself feeling sad or tearful, allow yourself to experience these very normal emotions, and make no apologies for them. You are human. You are capable. You can survive the holiday season!

Source: Burrell, S. (Reviewed 2017). Fighting depression around the holidays. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Losing the Holiday Blues

The holiday season can be a time of joy, happiness, and family get-togethers. But for some, it is a time of loneliness and anxiety about the future.

Why do I have the holiday blues?

Many things can cause the holiday blues. It could be stress, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, money problems, or being unable to be with one's family and friends. For many, the holidays bring back old memories of friends and loved ones who are no longer present. The demands of shopping and family reunions can also lead to feelings of tension.

Some people develop stress symptoms such as headaches, excessive drinking, overeating, and problems sleeping. There is also the post holiday let down after January 1st. This is common after such intense activity for so many weeks. It may also result from disappointments during the holidays, added to the excess fatigue and stress.

Here's one way to see if you are depressed.

You may be wondering if you have symptoms of depression. One way of determining that is to take a brief screening online or with your doctor. Only you will see the results of an online screening. You can then choose to print a copy of the results for your own records or to give to your physician or a mental health professional. If you choose to do a screening with your physician, he or she can assist you in determining a treatment plan.

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). Losing the holiday blues. Retrieved April 7, 2017, from <https://www.va.gov/>



Green Up the Holidays

The holidays are a time for families to get together and celebrate, but they bring with them a lot of extra waste. Here are some simple tips for you and your family to “go green” this holiday season:

Reduce waste with these gift ideas.

There is no need to buy gifts—why not make them at home? You can bake cookies or breads for all of the neighbors, or you can invite them to your house for a home-cooked meal. Tickets to local events or movies can be great gifts that don’t take up space. Or you can make a donation to a favorite charity in someone’s name.

When you do buy gifts, how about purchasing good secondhand items or things that have been made from recycled products? Be sure to bring reusable tote bags when you are out shopping.

Give items that help others go green.

- Canvas tote bag
- Energy-saving light bulbs
- Power strips to plug in energy-zapping appliances

Use recycled or reusable materials for gift wrapping.

Old calendar pages can make beautiful envelopes or be used to wrap small gifts. Use cloth bags that can be reused in the future. Use reusable gift boxes that won’t easily be damaged. Reuse ribbons and decorations from last year’s holiday cards. Use real unbuttered popcorn in packages instead of Styrofoam peanuts. Bubble Wrap and Styrofoam peanuts can be recycled by dropping them off at shipping companies.

Wrapping Paper Ideas

- Use lightly colored paper with white backgrounds. This is more easily recycled.
- Choose recycled gift paper.
- Avoid metallic and foil papers which cannot be recycled.
- Make your own wrapping paper from paper that is to be recycled anyway.

The Christmas Tree

Live trees help the environment and can be replanted after the holidays. Make sure you purchase one that can survive in your climate. If you buy a cut tree, make sure you check with your local waste agency to see where it can be recycled. Don’t buy a flocked tree—they can’t be recycled. Christmas trees can be used for mulch in the garden. Pine needles are a great ingredient for potpourri.

Leftover Food and Candy

Check with your local shelter or food bank to see if these can be donated. Unopened foods such as packages of pasta, canned meats, fruits, and vegetables are often needed at food pantries.

Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). Green up the holidays. Raleigh, NC: Author.