

10 Tips for Enjoying the Holidays

Our feelings about the holidays are very personal. They can cause us to feel happy, sad, or ambivalent. The holidays can also cause stress because of:

- Overscheduling, overindulging, and overspending
- Too much time with family or not enough
- Personal or family illness
- School/work demands
- Expectations of what you *should* do
- Seasonal Affective Disorder or depression

No matter how you feel, the following tips can help you enjoy the holidays as much as possible.

1. **Reflect on what is important to you during the holidays.** This may change over time, but thinking about what you want for this holiday season will help you choose more intentionally about who you would like to spend time with and how you would like to spend the time. It's hard to have a meaningful holiday if you don't determine ahead of time what will give it meaning.
2. **Make a plan as early as possible about what you will do during the holidays.** Try to plan at least one activity that is important to you for each holiday that you celebrate. Feel free to initiate activities with family and friends. Consider volunteer activities. Making a plan well in advance can give you something to look forward to and help you feel a greater sense of control.
3. **Communicate clearly how others can assist or support you.** Accept offers to help shop, wrap, or cook. Some people may not know how best to help, especially if your needs and desires have changed from last year. Most people are happy to help as long as they understand clearly what you want and they have enough time to provide the support.
4. **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Try your best to make good food choices and relax to restore energy. Your endurance will be better if you can stick to your daily routine as much as possible, including exercise.
5. **Manage your spending.** It's easy to feel the pressure of consumerism during the holidays. Decrease the financial stress by making and sticking to a budget. Thoughtfulness need not come with a hefty price tag. Gift solutions include: reducing the number of gifts; initiating a gift exchange; giving to a favorite charity in family members' names; and providing gift certificates for babysitting, snow shoveling, a home-cooked meal, or time together. Gift cards can also be

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purchased for small amounts and the receiver will enjoy thinking of you as he or she enjoys a cup of coffee or music download “on you.”

- 6. *Monitor alcohol and medications – individually and together.*** It's easy to overindulge in alcohol during the holidays. Moderation is key so that your balance and emotional well-being are not negatively impacted. If you do not usually drink alcohol, consider beforehand how alcohol and your medications may interact, especially if you're taking a new medication or an increased dose. Maintain your daily medication schedule. Missed doses can cause you to feel less than your best or, worse, cause a medical issue that requires emergency care.
- 7. *Manage your expectations for family gatherings.*** When multiple generations and multiple families celebrate together, it can be challenging to feel heard and understood. Be clear about what you need the most and flexible about the rest.
- 8. *If you are won't be going 'home' for the holidays find out what's going on in the area.*** Each city and country has their own unique traditions when it comes to the holidays. Do some research and plan to participate in activities that will make you feel comfortable.
- 9. *Get in touch with people in the area you know (classmates, friends, advisors) and let them know that you'll be in town around the holidays.*** You may be invited to a local event or celebration.
- 10. *Reflect on what went well this holiday season and improvements you would like to make for next year.***

For more information about this topic or to set up an appointment to work with a counselor, please contact the Johns Hopkins Student Assistance Program (JHSAP) at (443) 287-7000 or visit our website at www.jhsap.org