

Holiday Stress Hotspots: Manage Holiday Stress with Knowledge

From Simma Lieberman, for About.com

There are four main causes of holiday stress: gift giving obligations, expenses, a lack of time, and unrealistic expectations about creating a perfect holiday. To reduce holiday stress, arm yourself with knowledge. Know the ins and outs of these top four holiday stress hotspots and follow these effective stress-reducing tips.

Holiday Stress Hotspot: Gifts

- Make a list of everyone for whom you need to buy gifts.
- Look for gifts you can buy for multiple people. Similarly, look for stores where you can buy many gifts for a lot of people.
- Plan a few back-up gifts, generic gifts with blank cards for people you might forget or who unexpectedly give you a gift.
- Focus on the point of gift giving: showing your appreciation for someone. Enjoy the process of finding them something they'll like.
- If you don't like shopping, plan a single gift shopping day. Make this day sooner than later to avoid the holiday shopping craze.
- Or, don't go shopping. Thanks to the Internet and catalogs, you have enough time to order gifts so you don't have to leave your house or office.
- Better yet, take off the whole month of December and go to the mountains where no one can call, email or page you.

Holiday Stress Hotspot: Holiday Expenses

- Set a budget, and stick to it. Don't buy gifts that you'll spend the rest of the year trying to pay off.
- Think of alternative ways to give gifts (set up a gift exchange, make some handmade gifts or foodstuffs).
- Choose inexpensive ways of entertaining and enjoying. Have a potluck party instead of providing all of the food yourself.
- Do activities with family and friends that cost little or no money: go on walks, have a movie night instead of going to see the latest blockbuster together.
- Give the gift of a phone call or note. Let the people you care about know how important they are to you with words, not expensive gifts. Most people need this type of nourishment, in general, and they may need to be remembered even more during the holidays. It may be the best gift they get.

Holiday Stress Hotspot: A Lack of Time

- Complete your gift shopping early. This will relieve you of one of the biggest time stresses during the holidays.
- Refuse Invitations. You don't have to go to every party just because you're invited. If party going becomes a chore or exhausting, step back and slow down the pace.
- Take time for yourself. With so much emphasis on time with family and friends, many people feel guilty taking time for themselves. Take it. When you consciously plan to have alone time, it keeps you empowered and reduces possible feelings of melancholy during the holiday season. You will also be less overwhelmed by external stimuli.
- Share the tasks. Don't take on too much. View your to-do list as an opportunity to spend time with people.
- Share responsibilities and your tasks will take half as long and be more enjoyable.

Holiday Stress Hotspot: Anticipation and Expectations

- Be realistic. Just because it's the holiday season, family issues will not suddenly disappear and everything will not be perfect.
- Adjust your expectations. Expect a few bumps in the road at family events and gatherings and you'll be better able to deal with them.
- Relish traditions. Focus on those little traditions that evoke positive memories for the holidays: songs, events, rituals, and more. Consider creating new traditions if older ones are marred with mixed memories. .

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