

## **Staying Sane During the Holidays**

The hustle and bustle of the holiday season is in full swing. As the end of the year quickly approaches, people often overexert themselves to find the perfect last minute gifts, to prepare complicated holiday meals or to graciously entertain even the most difficult guests. Bruce Spring, M.D., assistant professor of clinical psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California, offers these tips to curtail holiday stress:

### **Be realistic**

People should realize that relationships will not change just because it is the holidays. Expectations that family, friends or loved ones will act differently often result in disappointment or unnecessarily strain a relationship. Look for the good and focus on enjoying that.

### **Plan ahead**

Assess your financial situation and then decide on how much to spend on each person. This time of year, meaningful gifts can be more touching and healthful than expensive gifts. Remember gifts of service, such as helping with chores or a massage, are free and may be more appreciated.

### **Maintain exercise programs and continue to eat healthy**

Just because it's the holidays does not mean that exercise or healthy eating should stop. Coupled together, healthy living relieves stress and minimizes regret from overindulgence.

### **Give yourself extra time**

Giving to ourselves allow us to better give to other people. Take a few extra minutes to complete a task or to just relax. Saying no to some requests can help avoid feeling overwhelmed.

### **Be aware of your feelings**

Don't suppress your feelings for the sake of the holidays. If you are depressed or angry, talk to someone. It is better to deal with situations now than to bottle up feelings that can later snowball. Turn to family, friends, clergy or professionals. The key is to turn to someone who listens to you and provides helpful advice. Inappropriate or ineffective listeners can make things worse.

### **Perfection is the enemy of good**

The quest for perfection can often ruin a good thing. Don't lose focus on the purpose of what you are doing. Realize that others will appreciate and enjoy your efforts no matter what.

Spring says another way to alleviate stress is to appreciate the positive aspects of the holidays. Approaching the season with this attitude can make the holiday experience more enjoyable.

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