

# Managing stress during the holidays

## TIP SHEET



The Christmas and holiday period can be an exciting time of get-togethers and holiday-related activities. Many people, however, may face a range of stresses heading into this time. These tips can help you to identify and manage stress.

Christmas and the holiday period can be stressful. You might need to complete tasks or projects at work before the end of the year, Christmas shopping, organising Christmas events and arranging activities for school children over January. Sometimes, the pressure to catch up with family at Christmas can also be stressful, possibly as a result of tensions between family members.

## 1 Signs of stress

Stress can result in a range of different physical and emotional reactions. Be aware of signs that might indicate that you are under stress, including:

- being short-tempered
- headaches
- an upset stomach
- sleeping difficulties
- a lack of concentration
- getting sick more often
- tension in your jaw
- fatigue or extreme tiredness.

## 2 Managing stress

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms and this is unusual for you, consider the following ways to help manage your stress.

### Organise yourself

Schedule time for exercise, relaxation, cooking and eating meals, and plan to complete certain tasks on certain days. These routines can be reassuring as they make life more predictable. Also plan time for the additional things you need to do at this time of year, such as Christmas shopping, wrapping and catching up with family and friends. Book these them in your diary, so you know you will get them done.

### Have reasonable expectations

The holiday period can be a time when we place additional expectations and responsibilities upon ourselves.

Re-evaluate what you can reasonably get done before Christmas, so that these goals are achievable. This might mean deferring a get-together with friends until the New Year, or minimising the amount of cooking you might do for Christmas activities.

You may find that by reviewing your goals, the lead up to Christmas day is more enjoyable.

### Be kind to yourself by giving yourself positive feedback

Tell yourself that you can cope, and that you will complete the things you need to do to the best of your ability. Avoid negative self-talk, including statements such as I can't do this or I can't cope with this. You are an individual who is doing the best you can, and negative self-talk can increase your stress levels.

### Spend time with people you care about

Spend time with friends and loved ones who will listen to you and understand you. Share your thoughts and feelings with people who care about you and may be able to support you.

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### Take time out

Take time out by doing something on a regular basis that is just for you. This might involve going for a short walk in the fresh air, listening to your favourite music, having a coffee/tea/chai at a café or at home, watching your favourite TV program, reading, having a nap, talking to a friend, having a special treat or gardening.

Whatever you choose, it doesn't have to be an expensive or long activity; just something to give yourself a short break from the stress around you.

### Eat a balanced diet

It can be tempting to indulge during the holidays, with lots of events happening with food and drinks on offer.

Try to maintain a healthy diet though, including lots of fruits and vegetables. Also try to minimise foods that are high in fat and sugar, and avoid depending on cigarettes, alcohol or drugs to cope with stress.

### Exercise

Exercise can have a positive effect on your emotional health and wellbeing. Exercise your heart and lungs regularly, with activities including walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, aerobics, dancing or going to the gym.

Try to exercise for at least 15-30 minutes, three days per week. If you're finding this is hard to achieve at this time of year, aim for just a 10 minute walk each day.

The short break can help to refresh you and re-energise you for your next tasks.

### Practise relaxation

Relaxation can include formal exercises such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation and yoga as well as more informal methods such as listening to music and taking time out to read a book. There are a range of relaxation apps available to download for smartphones and tablets such as Smiling Mind and Breathe.

### Rest

Aim for seven to eight hours of sleep each night. When working or studying, take regular breaks, as there is only so much your mind can absorb at one time, without time to process and integrate information. Rest your eyes as well as your mind, particularly when spending time looking at computer screens or smart devices.

### More information

Useful relaxation apps:

Smiling Mind:  
<http://smilingmind.com.au/>

Breathe:  
<http://au.reachout.com/reachout-breathe-app>

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