

13 tips for surviving the holidays: Part two

Last week, I discussed ways to maintain your physical health over the holiday season, but what about your mental health? It should come as no surprise that the holiday season can be one of stress, conflict, even loneliness for many. Here are my best tips for keeping your emotional health in tip-top shape during this sometimes trying season:

7) Don't overbook: Holiday freneticism is hard to avoid. Deliberately create "circuit breakers" in your schedule to avoid Yule burnout.



8) Light it up: The holidays coincide with the darkest time of the year. Get some light in your eyes with an early morning walk, or consider a light box to fend off Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

9) Overcome the blues: While it may seem paradoxical to be depressed during the traditional "Season of Joy," it's actually quite natural. The contrast between your circumstances and the illusion that everyone else has it better is never more accentuated. Unhappy childhood memories surface, and loneliness and feelings of failure are highlighted against a festive background.

If you fall prey to these feelings around holiday time, don't hesitate to seek help. Friends, family, a clergy member or even a good self-help book may work, but seek professional counseling if you truly can't shake the Holiday Blues.

10) Defy consumerism: It's unrealistic to expect that the reality of our holiday experience will match the idealized hype. After all, retailers want us to buy a lot of material stuff, which whips us into a shopping frenzy, and inevitably leaves us disappointed when we can't "have it all." Manage your expectations and enjoy the little things about the holiday season. Think about its true meaning, and leave room amid the glitz to get in touch with your spirituality.

11) Create a "quiet oasis": Amid all the demands of the holidays, you need a place to retreat. Create a calm zone where, for a few hours a week, you won't be preoccupied with shopping, parties or family obligations. Avoid the temptation to check your email, texts, holiday sales announcements or social media for a short time. Read a favorite book, listen to music, or enjoy a regular hobby to reboot your brain.

12) Flex your altruism muscles: The holidays are a great time to "give back"—and I don't mean just stuffing envelopes for your doorman or postman. The dirty, dark secret about altruism is that it's actually selfish—studies show that giving can enhance health and extend longevity.

Volunteering is a way to get outside of yourself and reap the benefits of generosity. You can help a senior citizen, visit the sick, shop for Christmas toys for needy kids, tutor a child or mentor an aspiring young person. Most localities maintain a roster of volunteer opportunities.

13) Avoid isolation: Loneliness can kill. Scientific studies verify it. This holiday, reach out to friends and family members whose social networks are limited. If you're feeling left out, take part in a volunteer activity or communal worship service.

I hope these tips, and the ones I provided last week, help to carry you through the holiday season in good health and good spirits. Remember that even in this season of giving, one of the best gifts you can give is the gift of self-care.