Lyra

Merry and Bright:
Tips for Maintaining Mental Health This Holiday Season

As the end of the year approaches, the holiday season sometimes brings more stress than good cheer.

Winter holidays are a source of joy for many people, but they also arrive with burdens including financial strain, busy schedules, and unrealistic expectations. Portrayals of perfect holiday gatherings may feel out of reach for many individuals when compared with their realities. And the expectation that the year should end on a cheerful note can make the holiday blues feel even worse. These factors, among others, can increase short-term stress levels during the holidays and add to existing, long-term mental health conditions.

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But it is possible to enjoy end-of-year festivities while maintaining inner calm, holding boundaries, and focusing on what matters most. Managing expectations around time commitments, gifts, and emotions can help ease stress as you close out the year. And relying on self-care techniques that are useful year-round—such as sticking to sleep and exercise routines, eating well, and practicing mindfulness—can continue to serve you throughout the winter. Read on to learn more about strategies to support mental health in the midst of the holiday bustle.
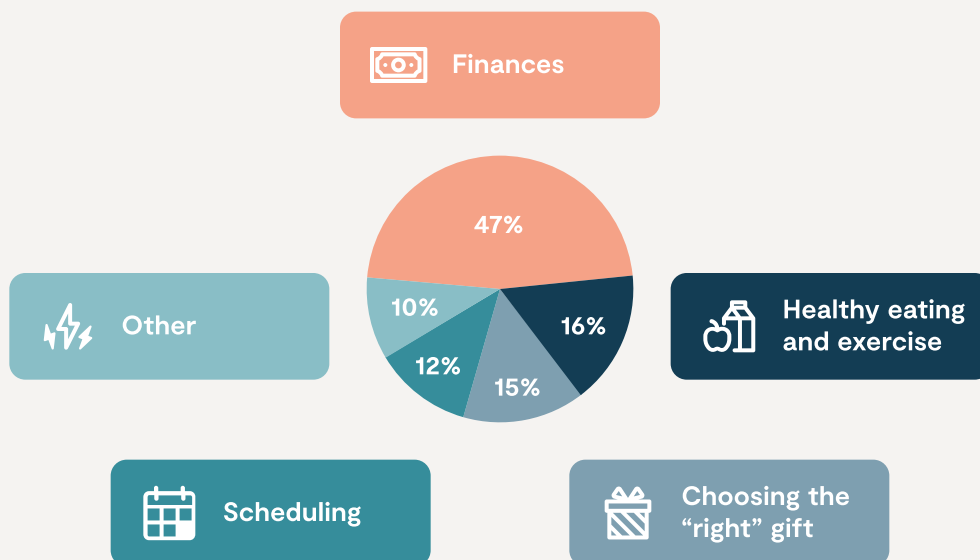
Hi! I'm Kendall Browne, PhD

I'm a clinical psychologist and Workforce Transformation Program Manager at Lyra, your mental health benefit. I'm passionate about destigmatizing mental health care and helping you improve your mental health at work and at home.

Unboxing holiday stress

For many people, the holidays bring feelings of happiness and are a time to connect with family, friends, and loved ones. However, some people are more likely to feel their stress levels rise, not decrease. Hosting and attending end-of-year gatherings, sharing gifts, and traveling are just a few factors that can boost short-term anxiety and exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions like depression. And high expectations to have a joyous holiday season may contribute to additional negative feelings.

What's stressing you out?

A Healthline survey found that money was the top cause of stress during the holidays, but it's not the only factor. Here's a look at the main causes of holiday stress that respondents identified in the survey.

Finances

47%

10%

12%

15%

16%

Other

Healthy eating and exercise

Scheduling

Choosing the "right" gift

Source

Mills, David. "Big Meals, Tight Schedules and Wallets: What Stresses Us Most at the Holidays," Healthline, 2016. Accessed October 4, 2022.
https://www.healthline.com/health-news/what-stresses-us-most-at-the-holidays-113015

8 ways to promote end-of-year wellness

The holidays can add a layer of stress to the end of the year, but there are small steps you can take to feel more like yourself. Whether you're traveling or celebrating the holidays at home, spending time with loved ones, or seeking solitude, the tips below can help you cultivate peace of mind throughout the winter festivities.*

1. ### Plan ahead.

   Consider triggers that have caused you stress during past holiday seasons, and make plans to curb those sources of anxiety where you can (e.g., create an itinerary ahead of holiday trips to minimize stress on the road).

2. ### Have realistic expectations.

   No holiday season is perfect. Take the pressure off yourself by trying to acknowledge and accept imperfection. Celebrate in ways that bring you closer to what matters most, and avoid comparing your reality to ideals.

3. ### Make a budget.

   Before the holidays arrive, set limits on expenses related to gift-giving and travel to reduce financial strain.

4. ### Eat and drink in moderation.

   Cook nourishing meals, and maintain your typical diet. Avoid using substances to manage stress, and consider whether to attend events where there will be pressure to drink alcohol.

5. ### Set boundaries.

   Create alone time for yourself, or reserve time for activities you enjoy, especially if family events add to anxiety. Try opting out of obligations that bring more negative than positive feelings.

6. ### Take time away from work.

   Discuss your workload with your manager in advance, and collaborate with them to adjust project schedules as needed.

7. ### Volunteer.

   Volunteering can provide a way to give back to others, feel purpose, and create meaningful connections with your community.

8. ### Seek support.

   Stress associated with the holidays is usually short-lived. However, if you're finding it hard to function well at home, at work, or in your relationships, reach out to a mental health professional when these feelings are overwhelming.

Prioritize yourself this holiday season

Whether you're looking for self-guided activities to cultivate joy during the holidays or you're in need of more structured guidance from a mental health provider, Lyra offers personalized tools to help you end the year feeling balanced.

Get started with Lyra today.

*Sources

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