

The holiday season is a busy time for most.

Nothing about our usual daily life goes away but the holidays bring an extra layer of activities and responsibilities, both real and imagined, that take up time, money and emotional energy. Even if we enjoy many aspects of the season, there may well be moments when we wish we could rewind the calendar to somewhere in the middle of August.

The holidays are also not all tinsel and holly for everyone. This time of year can bring up feelings of overwhelm, anxiety, stress and even depression. It's also a time where people may feel acutely aware of the void left by the loss of a loved one, and/or their own personal loneliness. Add social events, late nights, overindulging and alcohol and this can be a recipe that elicits strong emotions or makes you more sensitive to both your own feelings, as well as those of others.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Holiday depression, anxiety and stress can affect anyone at any age. Sometimes, these feelings are triggered by a specific event or life experience. There are many things happening around the holidays that can act as triggers.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOURSELF?

Holiday depression, stress, or anxiety can be managed. Many people who experience depression, anxiety and stress during the holidays may feel a pressure to just 'get over it' on their own. Others may need time to recognise how deeply this affects their life. If your holiday depression, anxiety or stress seems severe or is interfering with your job or home life, talk to your doctor.

There are things you can do to help you cope through the holiday season. Taking time for yourself, like going for a walk may give you the peace and quiet you need to clear your head and recharge your batteries. Any form of physical activity is good for your health both cardiovascular and mental health too.

Happy Holidays...

or is it?

Good hormones released through exercise can help you cope better with stress and depression. The physical activity may also help you combat a feeling of loneliness if you join an exercise class, or social game of soccer, or a friend for a walk or cycle. The activity will also help combat some of those extra calories often consumed during the holiday season.

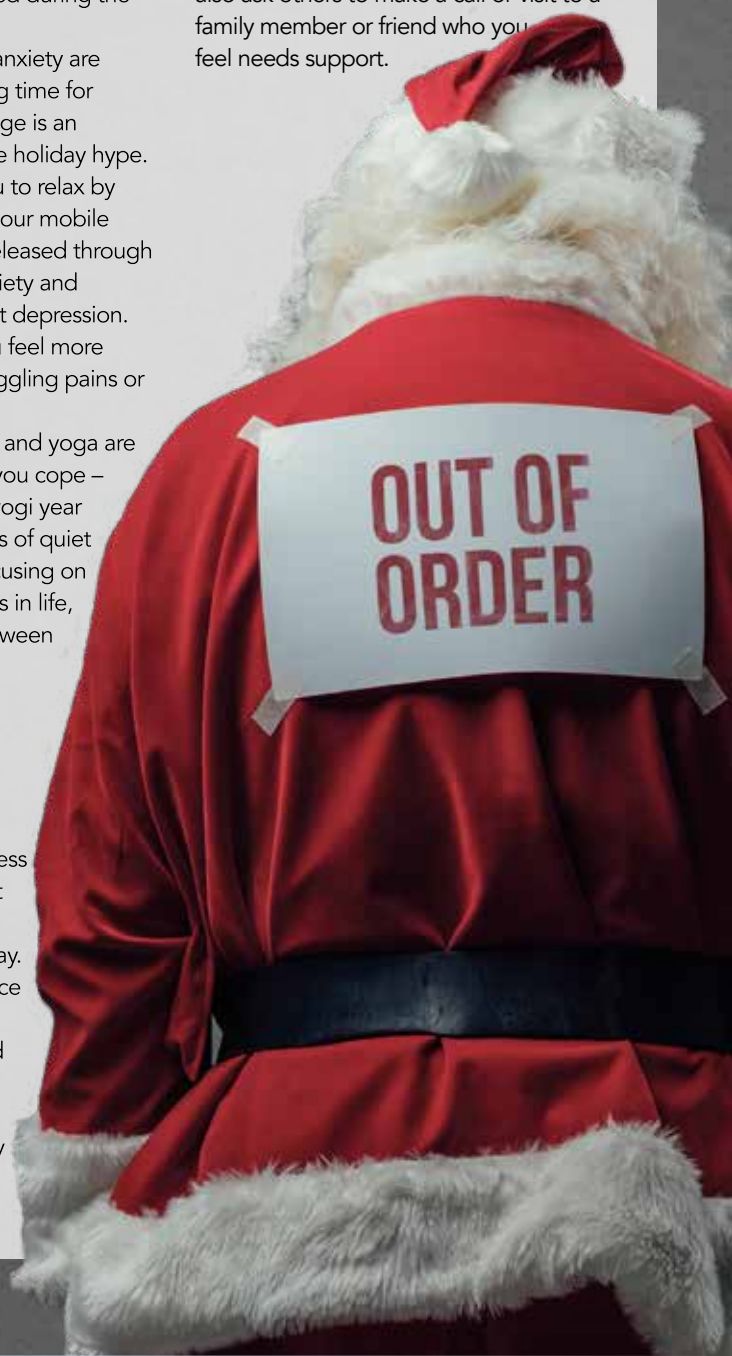
If your stress levels and anxiety are feeling overwhelming, taking time for yourself and having a massage is an excellent way to manage the holiday hype. Massage not only forces you to relax by lying down and turning off your mobile phone, but the hormones released through massage will lower your anxiety and stress and even help combat depression. The relaxation will make you feel more energetic and relieve any niggling pains or headache.

Meditation, mindfulness and yoga are also excellent ways to help you cope – even if you aren't a regular yogi year round. As little as 10 minutes of quiet time, deep breathing, or focusing on the important relevant things in life, can make the difference between having a good or bad day.

HOW CAN YOU HELP OTHERS?

Supporting a loved one who is experiencing holiday depression, loneliness or stress can be difficult. You may not understand why your loved one feels or acts a certain way. Some people who experience this feel like they have to do things a certain way or avoid things or situations, and this can create frustration or conflict with others. You may feel under pressure to take part in these behaviours or

adjust your own behaviours to protect or avoid upsetting a loved one. Support can be a delicate balance. Make sure you are in a good place emotionally to help and it is not adding to your own burden. You could also ask others to make a call or visit to a family member or friend who you feel needs support.





Some quick tips to help you through the season may be:

1 Keep your regular routine
A change in routine can lead to additional stress. Try to exercise at your usual time, go to meetings that you normally go to, and stick to as normal a diet as you possibly can.

2 Think moderation
While it may be easy to drink and eat too much at parties and special dinners, we should try not to overindulge with food and/or alcohol. Remember, eating and drinking may feel like they temporarily "ease the pain" of the holiday blues, but they can also lead to feelings of guilt.

3 Be realistic, and try not to expect the "ideal" holiday
So many of us have an idealised version of what the holidays should be like and are very disappointed when they don't live up to those expectations. Try to be realistic. Remember, nobody has a perfect holiday or perfect family.

4 Stay connected
Make sure to leave time to spend with friends and/or family who value you. And if they don't live close by, call them for a "reality check" or some "grounding." Remember to ask for support if you need it.

5 Throw guilt out the window
Try not to put unreasonable pressure on yourself to be happy, to rejoice, or even to enjoy the holidays. Likewise, try not to over analyse your interactions with others. Give yourself a break this holiday season.

6 Don't be alone, if you don't want to be
If you anticipate spending the holidays alone, try to volunteer somewhere, like in a soup kitchen, with children in group homes, or the elderly in various facilities.

The appreciation you're likely to receive may help you to feel better about yourself, but more importantly, you'll have company.

7 Focus on today, not yesterday
There's something about being with family and old friends that makes us become who we were and not who we are. When you find yourself reverting to old childhood patterns with family members, try to walk away for a minute and remember who you are now. Also remember that it's not necessary to play the same role as you did when you were younger, even if others are encouraging you to do so through their behaviours. If there is someone at the get-together who knows what you are like today, make sure to reach out to them and draw them into the interactions. That will help to ground you

8 Just say no
It's OK to say no when you're asked to do more than you can. It's fine to say no to some invitations and fine to say no to those asking for favours. Remember, this is your holiday too.

9 Ask for help
Holidays are often a time people attempt to take on too much or do too much on their own. It's OK to ask for help from family and friends, whether that's for decorating, shopping, cooking, or a shoulder to lean on, just ASK.

10 Be good to yourself
The holiday season may be busy, but it doesn't have to drive you insane. You do have the ability to bring down the stress and bring up the joy. After all, the best gift we can give ourselves and those around us is our own peace of mind.



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