

Managing stress during the holidays



TIP SHEET

Holiday and festival periods can be an exciting time of get-togethers and special activities. Many people, however, may face a range of stresses and challenges heading into these times, such as:

- shopping for gifts and other festive items, particularly if you are experiencing financial difficulties
- managing end-of-year/season tasks and deadlines at work
- arranging activities and care for children during school holidays
- pressures to catch up with family, particularly if there are tensions between family members
- grief or loneliness, due to the loss of a family member or separation from family and friends.

Everyone has different ways of managing their stress, so it's important to find out what works for you.

What are some of the signs of stress?

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

- being short-tempered or irritable
- headaches
- an upset stomach
- sleeping difficulties
- a lack of concentration
- getting sick more often
- tension in your jaw or shoulders
- fatigue or extreme tiredness
- finding it difficult to relax and be calm.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, try the following tips to help reduce your stress levels.

! Nine tips for managing stress during the holidays

1. 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 present shopping and wrapping, and catching up with family and friends.

Book these in your diary, so you know you will get them done, and ask for help if you need it.

2. 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 the holiday, so that these goals are achievable. This might mean deferring a catch-up with friends until after the holiday, minimising the amount of cooking you might do for festive activities, or asking family members for help with tasks.

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

3. 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 doing the best you can, and negative self-talk can actually increase your stress levels.

Relationships Australia
VICTORIA

4. Connect with people you care about

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

If you're physically distanced from loved ones, try reaching out over the phone or online, or joining a social group in your local area, such as [MeetUp](#).

5. 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.

6. Practise relaxation

Try relaxation exercises such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation or yoga to take your mind off your stress for a while. These online resources and smartphone apps may help:

- **Smiling Mind:** <https://www.smilingmind.com.au>
- **Insight Timer:** <https://insighttimer.com>
- **Beyond Blue:** <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/staying-well/relaxation-exercises>
- **ReachOut Australia:** <https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps>

7. Exercise

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

Try to exercise for at least 15 to 30 minutes, three days per week. If you're finding this 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 what you have to do next.

8. Eat a balanced diet

It can be tempting to indulge during the holidays, with lots of meal-based events happening.

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.

9. Rest

Aim for 7 to 9 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.

Need support?

If you're experiencing persistent stress that won't go away, it may be a good idea to talk to your GP or seek support from a professional counsellor.

To find out how our counsellors can help and find your nearest centre, visit www.rav.org.au/counselling

Please note: We are not a crisis service. If you feel unsafe and need help now, call 000 (triple zero). For 24/7 crisis support, call [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14.

A number of organisations stay open during holiday periods and are available to support you. Visit www.rav.org.au/resources/mental-health-services to find services that can help.

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.