

Fit for Life

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Fit for Life

WELLNESS

Keep in mind these strategies to reduce holiday stress

BY POTTSTOWNMERCURY ON DECEMBER 2, 2016 • ([LEAVE A COMMENT](#))



Two holiday wreaths are displayed. The holiday season and all that comes with it can be very stressful for some people.
Michilea Patterson — Digital First Media

By [Michilea Patterson](http://www.pottsmmerc.com/lifestyle/20161202/keep-in-mind-these-strategies-to-reduce-holiday-) (<http://www.pottsmmerc.com/lifestyle/20161202/keep-in-mind-these-strategies-to-reduce-holiday->

stress#author1), The Mercury

Buy gifts, shop for food, send Christmas cards, decorate the tree, put up the lights, and make travel plans are just a few of the items that make the list and are checked twice during the holiday season. Between the “Merry Christmas” and “Happy Holidays” sentiments, this month is also a time for added stress from too-long holiday lists or other emotional feelings that arise.

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Stress is not uncommon and in some cases can actually be good for the body. Eustress is positive stress where people experience benefits to their health, performance or emotional well-being; whereas distress describes anxiety or pain.

Symptoms of unhealthy stress include sleeping too much or not enough, eating too much or a loss of appetite, being irritable with loved ones, and just generally feeling unhappy or depressed, said licensed clinical psychologist Sharon Kelly, of [Village Psychology in West Chester](http://www.villagepsychology.com/)

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“So it’s anything that’s outside the realm of what would I be doing if I felt really happy, comfortable and calm. Anything outside of that spectrum means maybe I’m not dealing with this so well,” she said.

Too much stress can lead to major depression, anxiety disorders and even physical issues like heart disease, said licensed professional counselor Brandon Ballantyne, of [Reading Hospital Center for Mental Health](https://www.readinghealth.org/services/behavioral-health/about/our-facilities/)

Below are some common reasons people may be overly stressed during the holidays:

AN EMOTIONAL TIME FOR SOME

Ballantyne said social gatherings and family holidays can be especially hard for people experiencing grief or loss.

Troy Brindle, director at [Springfield Psychological](https://springpsych.com/), said the reasons for holiday stress varies but often involves an emotional or situational experience. Difficult life situations such as the loss of a job, a relationship breakup, or relocating away from family can all result in emotional turmoil during this season, Brindle said.

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Fit for Life, promotes healthy living through events, videos, photos and more. The initiative was created through a partnership between Digital First Media and the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation.

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WINTER BLUES

He also said people can have a difficult time adjusting to colder temperatures during this time of year and the shorter days. Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD, is a depression that's comes from the changes in the season.

“Seasonal Affective Disorder or changes in climate can also be a significant contributor that boosts someone's feelings of depression or sadness,” Brindle said.



Gift wrapping paper and ribbons are displayed. In addition to good cheer and joyful noises, the holiday season can also bring added stress. Michilea Patterson — Digital First Media

ONE IS THE LONELIEST NUMBER

The holidays with all of its emphasis on coming together in a social environment can lead some people to experience feelings of loneliness, said licensed professional counselor Rebecca Green, of Reading Hospital for Mental Health.

FAMILY, IT'S A LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP

Where lack of family can cause some to feel lonely; seeing family members can lead to anxiety for others. Kelly said family is a big reason for stress around the holidays. She said there are all types of family dynamics and people may be preparing themselves for judgment or criticism from certain family members.

“You know based on history you're kind of going into that fight or flight mode. You're on alert,” Kelly said. “Therapy actually becomes a good intervention for that because you know what's going to happen so it's an opportunity to either change you way of responding to it or handling it.”

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Kelly said another big contributor to stress during the holidays is spending. People with anxiety during the season may spend more thinking it will help with those feeling but it actually does the opposite.

“Spending may not be the cause of the stress, maybe almost more of a consequence of stress,” Kelly said.

Brindle said it’s very important to stick to a budget during the holidays and that spending should be within a person’s means.

“A lot of people this time of year, they overextend themselves. Sometimes they overextend themselves because of guilt,” he said adding that parents may want their kids to have what other children have or be overcompensating for something else.

Now that some of the common causes of stress have been explained, here are a few tips to make the holidays smoother so people can get back to joyful noises and peace on Earth:



Parents and children participate in a yoga class in Pottstown. Relaxing techniques such as yoga and meditation are great ways to deal with holiday stress.

VOLUNTEER

“Volunteering is always a great thing to do,” Green said. She said people that experience feelings of loneliness during the holidays may find it helpful to volunteer which can lead to socialization opportunities and creating new friendships.

GET A HOBBY, GET IN TOUCH WITH THE SENSES

Ballantyne said learning a new hobby can help people focus their mind on something positive during the season. He also said engaging the five senses can be “naturally soothing.” People should pursue finding pleasurable sights, sounds, tastes, touches and smells.

DON’T SELF-MEDICATE WITH ALCOHOL

People that feel uncomfortable or anxious at a social gathering shouldn’t use alcohol as a

solution to those feelings but find healthier ways to deal with the situation, Kelly said.

“You’re just thinking it’s a way of coping but it just makes it a lot worse,” she said.

KEEP IT HEALTHY

“Working out always helps,” Kelly said adding that exercise can include something as simple as taking a nice walk to give yourself a break.

She said it’s important to physically stay healthy during the holidays by getting the right amount of sleep, eating nutritious meals, staying hydrated and getting regular exercise.

“All this stuff makes you so much more powerful and more confident in handling whatever emotional stress that’s going to be thrown at you,” Kelly said.

SELF-CARE

During the holidays, it can be easy to think about everyone else but then forget to take care of yourself as well. Brindle said you should take at least 15 to 30 minutes each day and do something just for you such as reading a book, listening to music or getting a massage.

Kelly said people should find quiet moments during the day through tools such as meditation to help manage feelings of anxiety, stress or depression.

KEEP THE PEACE

Brindle said some people may find it difficult seeing certain family members during this time of year but they should set aside differences to alleviate stress.

“I think it’s important to accept family members as they are, not trying to have them live up to an expectation that you have,” he said adding that staying away from controversial topics is another good idea.

PLAN AHEAD

“We know that the holidays come every year. It’s not a surprise,” Brindle said adding that people should pick specific days to shop and do their best not to procrastinate.

SAY NO EVERY NOW AND AGAIN

“It’s okay to say no,” Brindle said.

He said giving a “yes” all the time can lead people to feel overwhelmed or have feelings of resentment toward others.

TALK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Green said if people are really struggling during the holidays and having a very difficult time

with depression then it's recommended they seek professional health with therapy.

IN CONCLUSION

“The holidays are what you make them. There’s a lot of things in your life that can’t change ... I think you can always work on changing your attitude,” Brindle said. “Embrace the holidays and make it your own.”