

# Healthy People

Feeling down during the holidays can be tough, especially since you seem so out of step with the world. Everyone else seems to be beaming, ruddy-cheeked, bursting with holiday spirit. You're feeling wretched and exhausted.

## Finding the Holiday Spirit

- **Keep your expectations modest.** Don't get hung up on what the holidays are *supposed* to be like and how you're *supposed* to feel. If you're comparing your holidays to some abstract greeting card ideal, they'll always come up short. So don't worry about holiday spirit and take the holidays as they come.
- **Do something different.** This year, does the prospect of the usual routine fill you with holiday dread rather than holiday joy? If so, don't surrender to it. Try something different. Have Thanksgiving at a restaurant. Spend Christmas day at the movie theater. Get your family to agree to skip gifts and instead donate the money to a charity.
- **Forget the unimportant stuff.** Don't run yourself ragged just to live up to holiday tradition. So what if you don't get the lights on the roof this year? So what if you don't get the special Christmas mugs from the crawl space? Give yourself a break. Worrying about such trivial stuff will not add to your holiday spirit.
- **Volunteer.** Sure, you may feel stressed out and booked up already. But consider taking time to help people who have less than you. Try volunteering at a soup kitchen or working for a toy drive.
- **Head off problems.** Think about what people or situations trigger your holiday stress and figure out ways to avoid them. If seeing your uncle stresses you out, skip his New Year's party and just stop by for a quick hello on New Year's Day.
- **Ask for help -- but be specific.** See if your spouse will lug out the decorations. Ask your sister to help you cook -- or host the holiday dinner itself. Invite a friend along on shopping trips. People may be more willing to help out than you expect; they just need some guidance from you on what to do.
- **Find positive ways to remember loved ones.** Holidays may remind you of the loved ones who aren't around anymore. But instead of just feeling glum, do something active to celebrate their memory. For instance, go out with your sisters to your mom's favorite restaurant and give her a toast.
- **Don't overbook.** The holidays last for weeks and weeks. Pace yourself so not to get overwhelmed. Think about which parties you can fit in -- and which ones you really want to attend.
- **Forget about the perfect gift.** If you're already feeling overwhelmed, now is not the time to fret about finding the absolute best gift ever for your great aunt or your mailman. Remember: everybody likes a gift certificate.
- **Shop online.** Save yourself the inconvenience, the crowds, and the horrors of the mall parking lot by doing the bulk of your shopping online.
- **Stick to a budget.** The cost of holiday shopping mounts quickly and can make people feel out of control and anxious. So draw up a budget long before you actually start your shopping and stick to it.
- **Stay on schedule.** As much as you possibly can, try to stick with your normal routine during the holidays. Don't stay too late at parties. Don't pull an all-nighter wrapping presents. Disrupting your schedule and losing out on sleep can make your mood deteriorate.
- **Exercise.** While you may not feel like you have the time to exercise during the holidays, the benefits are worth it. "We know that exercise has a pretty strong anti-anxiety, anti-depression effect. When you're shopping, take a few extra laps around the mall.
- **Eat sensibly.** When you're facing a dozen holiday parties and family gatherings between now and New Year's, it's hard to stay committed to a sensible diet. But try. Eating healthy may keep you feeling better -- physically and emotionally. On the other hand, don't beat yourself up if you go overboard on the cookie platter in the break room. It's not a big deal. Just get back on track the next day.
- **Don't rely on holiday spirits (or other substances.)** The holidays can be a time of heavy drinking. It's a common strategy for getting over anxiety about holiday parties or having the boss as your Secret Santa. Remember that alcohol is itself a depressant and abusing it will leave you feeling worse. It also may not be safe for people taking antidepressant medication.
- **If you take medication, don't miss doses.** In the hustle of the holidays, it's easy to slack off and miss medication. Don't let that happen. Make sure that you're up-to-date on your refills, too.

**HAPPY**  
*Holidays*