



How to Take Care of Yourself during the Holidays

By Cassandra Van Dyck

“All any feeling wants is to be welcomed with tenderness. It wants room to unfold. It wants to relax and tell its story. It wants to dissolve like a thousand writhing snakes that with a flick of kindness become harmless strands of rope.”

- Geneen Roth

The holidays can be a beautiful time of year, filled with song, lights, abundant meals and shared experiences with loved ones. They can also be a time of struggle, frustration and loneliness. Listed below are some troublesome situations and tips you can use to take care of yourself during the holidays, in case you're having a hard time.

Situation: You have a lot on your plate and think you could use some extra support, but you find it challenging to ask for help.

What's Going On: Asking for help can be hard; maybe you don't want to burden your helper or admit that you need support.

“...people love helping. Not only does helping strengthen social ties, it makes helpers feel good about themselves,” says psychologist Ellen Hendriksen. Remember that you could try to do everything by yourself, but why would you if you could have a helping hand? Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it is expanding your team to tackle a problem more effectively.

Tips: Be specific. If you ask someone for help, they may not know what they can do. If you let someone know that you could use a hand making dinner on Sundays or folding laundry so you feel more organized at home, the helper has a clear view of how they can contribute. Trust that your helpers will let you know if the request is beyond their capacity and that if they say yes, that they're happy to help. A sign up sheet with tasks is often a good idea so everyone is clear on what needs to be done and what is being done by others.

Situation: You're feeling overwhelmed by the amount of things that need to be done.

What's Going On: “Experiencing stress and anxiety is often a reaction to an abnormal environment,” explains Maria Watson. Watson explains that there is a difference between acute and chronic stress. Acute stress is short-term and could be likened to the type of reaction you’d have if you came across a bear on a hike. Chronic stress is long term and often involves worrying about the future. Our bodies are not designed to deal with chronic stress, which is why we may feel overwhelmed when we have too many things going on. While minimizing chronic stress would be ideal, it is often not possible. However, there are some ways to find moments of peace in the midst of a hectic day.

Tips: First of all, breathe. Breathe big, deep, huge breaths. After inhaling for three counts, notice the pause that exists before you let the air escape for another three counts. Before inhaling again, pay attention to the rest that exists there, as well. It is amazing how calming it can feel to take just a few moments to connect with your breath.

Talk to someone that you feel comfortable with. If you have the time, go for a walk with them. The combination of talking to someone that you know is listening and getting exercise can help alleviate stress and make things seem more manageable. “Your feelings of being overwhelmed don’t stem from having too much on your plate, but from having too little, too little of what strengthens you,” says Marcus Buckingham. Take a few moments before you go to sleep at night and think about the things you do that make you feel strong. It can be hard, but make some time for those activities or those people. They will help you to stay strong enough to do all that you can.

Instead of looking at the big picture, try to focus on just one small thing that you can do to make things feel more manageable. Celebrate the small victories and pause where you can. “I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.” - Helen Keller

Situation: Your loved one is joining the family for a meal, but having them with everyone can be challenging.

What's Going On: Although you may be thrilled that your loved one is joining your family for a meal, the experience can come with many challenges. If you are responsible for cooking and cleaning and entertaining, it might feel hard to feel like you also must take care of and look out for your loved ones needs. If you are spending the whole time looking after everyone else, the holiday meal may not be a very enjoyable one for yourself.

Tips: Let your other family members know that you could use a hand, either with cleaning,

cooking or spending time with your loved one. If someone offers, take them up on it! Remember to take care of yourself. Spend some time sitting down with a warm drink and connect with the people you're sharing time with.

These are some specific issues and just a few tips for how to tackle some common issues that come up during the holiday season, but if there are others and you feel like you need support, don't hesitate to reach out to a trusted individual or a community organization.

