

## Holidays, Stress and Self-care

As we approach the Holiday season once again we are reminded not only of the joy and good spirit the Holidays typically bring for many but also about the stress and struggles faced by others during the holiday season, even before the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on our world.

From NBC the top reasons for holiday stress include:

- Lack of time to do everything, Lack of funds
- Pressure to create the "perfect" Christmas
- Unpleasant family visits
- Food woes leading to weight loss worries
- Work becoming significantly more demanding as the weather wears down
- Commercialism or hype, Pressure of giving or getting gifts
- Staying on a diet, Gifts getting delivered late or being lost in the mail

This year we are more aware of the elevated stress level in our society at large as people continue to battle with COVID- and non-pandemic related mental health issues which have soared over the last three years. We are hearing more about the impact from experts as well.

There has been an increase in overall stress in America that may have begun with the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and may seem like the distant past yet the aftermath remains," said Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD, chief executive officer of the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

According to one APA survey (2,212, adults) from December 2022 nearly 40% expected to be more stressed in the coming year. Whether conscious of them or not there are a number of contributing factors. Widespread trauma has not been limited to the pandemic. Global conflicts, racism and racial injustice, inflation, anti-Semitism and climate-related disasters are all weighing on the collective consciousness of Americans.

Psychologists with APA say a superficial characterization of day-to-day life being more normal is obscuring the posttraumatic effects that have altered our mental and physical health. When reviewing this year's survey data, APA psychologists widely agreed there is mounting evidence that our society is experiencing the psychological impacts of a collective trauma. Adults ages 35 to 44 experienced the highest increase in mental health diagnoses—45% in 2023—adults 18 to 34 reported the highest rate of mental illnesses at 50% in 2023.

More will be revealed on that front as we go forward and we are reminded once again how important self-care and stress reduction are. As the holidays arrive be sure to spend more time with loving, supportive family members and friends, do some nurturing things for your body, mind and spirit, spread the seeds and hands of kindness and compassion to those around you and beyond.

Here are some helpful tips from our friends at StressStop

[StressStop.com](https://www.stressstop.com).

1. **Stop rushing.** When you rush from one place to the next, the ENTIRE time you spend getting there, is going to be [STRESSFUL](#). When you allow extra time to get places and do things that take longer than you think, you will be AMAZED at how much stress you can eliminate.
2. **Get organized.** Disorganization is a major source of stress. When you waste time looking for things, or simply work in a disorganized environment, it eats away at your peace of mind. Organize your closets, your workspace and your car and watch your stress start to subside.
3. **Take 3 deep breaths.** [Breathing deeply](#) is one of the quickest and easiest ways to relieve stress. Any time you feel frazzled, hold your hand over your belly and watch your hand rise while you breathe in, and fall while you breathe out. Do this three times and you will quickly feel better and just as quickly lower your levels of stress.
4. **Make lists.** Shopping lists, to-do lists, and even a short list of what you want to talk about before you place an important phone call. This will save you time and money and the additional hassle of trying to retrace steps when you forget to do something because it wasn't written down.
5. **Listen more, talk less.** Research by Dr. James Lynch, formerly of the University of Maryland shows that if you [listen](#), your blood pressure goes down. And when you talk it goes up. Listening intently to what other people say is a mindfulness skill that will bring you into the present moment and lower your levels of stress.
6. **Practice gratefulness.** Make a mental list of 3-5 things you have to be grateful for and repeat it several times silently before you go to bed at night and/or right after you wake up in the morning. There's a fair amount of research that suggests this practice truly does lower stress.
7. **Go to bed earlier.** Going to bed early is a gift you can give yourself. Don't trade precious [sleep](#) time in order to watch an extra hour or two (or three) of TV or get a few more chores done. Make this adjustment gradually. When you skip the late-night TV (after 9 PM), you may find that you have an extra hour in the morning (when you have more willpower and your mind is clearer) to exercise, meditate, read an inspiring book or work on an important project without being interrupted.
8. **Forgive.** When you hold a grudge, it's like taking poison everyday while hoping someone else is going to die. Forgiving others helps you let go of grudges and ultimately helps *you* even more than it does the person you are forgiving.
9. **Shift your focus forward.** When we encounter a stressful problem, it often hits us by surprise. Sometimes we spend hours, days, or even weeks, fixated on the existence of this new problem, while feeling sorry for ourselves at the same time. But the minute we shift our focus forward from the problem to the solution, our stress quickly starts to fade as we become more and more *solution-focused* and less and less *problem-focused*.
10. **Consider your higher purpose and your most important values.** A lot of people experience a lot of stress, simply because they don't take time to consider their higher purpose or most important values. Figuring out what you value more than anything else - and then making a list of your top five values - helps you construct a life (and a list of goals) that will be in harmony with those values. People who live lives NOT in harmony with their higher purpose (particularly when their work is not in line with their values) will experience a lot of unnecessary stress.

Lastly, remember that more than half of all the alcohol consumed in the United States during the entire year occurs between Thanksgiving and New Year's. So please remain alert, be aware of others and be sure that if you expect to drink, you absolutely make a plan in advance and do not drive.