



Stress relief







For less stressful holidays, expect some changes

The stress of the holiday season typically stems from a hectic schedule and an unending to-do list, but this year the COVID-19 pandemic adds some new twists.

Rather than wondering how you'll get it all done, you may be concerned with what you'll be able to do.

Concerns about spreading the COVID-19 virus make it difficult to plan activities, placing some traditions in limbo. Rather than worrying about how things will be different, consider how to adapt and make this season bright:

-  **Be creative.** Brainstorm new ways of doing things that are most meaningful to you at this time of year.
-  **Ask for help.** Talk things over with family and friends and share ideas for celebrating.
-  **Be ready to compromise.** Not everyone is going to have the same ideas on holiday gatherings. Respect the feelings of others.
-  **Forget about perfection.** There is no right way to celebrate the holidays, especially this year.

Remember that last-minute changes to holiday plans are nothing new. Even Santa had to improvise when a blizzard hit — thank goodness for that red-nosed reindeer!

You've been through changes to holiday plans before and will get through them again. You may even find that doing things differently is more enjoyable and less stressful. As a bonus, you are making memories in a holiday season that will certainly go-down in history.



Have a socially distanced Plan B

It's difficult to say for certain what the holidays will be like, but being ready for socially distanced activities isn't a bad idea. Here are some to try:

- Schedule a virtual wine tasting, holiday carol sing-along, craft creation, or trivia game.
- Share holiday recipes and make one during an online gathering.
- Drop off holiday treats at the homes of friends and neighbors.
- Make a list of holiday-themed items and see how many your family can spot on a walk through the neighborhood.
- Donate money usually spent on holiday travel to your favorite charity. ♦

Test yourself:

Can you recognize signs of stress?

We face many challenges each day, from handling complaints and deadlines to family needs and schedule conflicts. When is it too much?



See if you can tell which of these are signs that you're under stress. The answers are on the next page.

1. You're more irritable or angry than usual.
2. Concentrating is difficult.
3. You're not sleeping well.
4. You have a fever.
5. Your hands feel chilly.
6. You're smoking or drinking more than usual.
7. Your motivation is sapped.
8. You're feeling tired or overwhelmed.
9. You're sad or depressed.
10. You can't stop shivering. ♦



To ease stress, try a mindful approach

When life moves at a fast and furious pace, a mindful approach lets you apply the brakes.

Being mindful creates awareness of the moment. It lets you pay attention to what is happening while remaining intentionally nonjudgmental.

As a result, mindfulness can help reduce stress and anxiety and put you in a better mood. By practicing mindfulness, you can train yourself to respond in a calmer, more productive way rather than reacting harshly or being overwhelmed.



Kinder reactions

Slowing down, even briefly, gives you the opportunity to temper your response. If someone bumps into you in the street, you might notice that it happened and how it feels.

Instead of impulsively reacting negatively, you realize it really doesn't matter, move on, and forget about it.

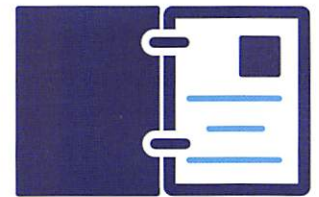
Mindfulness techniques can be useful when dealing with a negative or difficult situation at work as well.

If a coworker dismisses or criticizes your idea, being more aware of your body's emotional and physical reaction allows you to slow down and adjust your response to one that's more beneficial to your well-being. You can then move forward productively.

Sorting things out

Practicing mindfulness can also help create a feeling of calm when your head is swimming with tasks or distractions.

A brief mindful meditation can allow you to pause and ground yourself. As a result, you feel better able to cope with everything on your to-do list.



Becoming more mindful

Anyone can be more mindful. Common practices include:

- **Breathing:** Take a few minutes to pay attention to only your breathing. If your mind wanders, notice the distraction and come back to your focus on your breath.
- **Doing a body scan:** Notice the tension in your body, from feet to head, and visualize its release.
- **Taking notice:** Pay attention to your senses and how your body feels at various times during the day, such as when you're eating, driving, or waiting.
- **Mindfulness meditation:** Listen to a guided meditation on breathing, body scan, or another technique. They're available through apps and online.

Not perfect? Don't worry

An important part of mindfulness is not judging yourself.

Being mindful doesn't mean that frustrations and negative feelings disappear immediately. It takes time to develop a calmer reaction to them.

The key to enjoying the benefits of mindfulness is to practice it. Just as muscles get stronger when you lift weights, the mind gets stronger when mindfulness is practiced.

Guided meditations or yoga classes can be great resources for learning and practicing mindfulness techniques. As you practice, look for improved resilience and enjoy being calm, centered, and focused. ♦



Answer key: Signs of stress

Signs of stress: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are signs of stress.

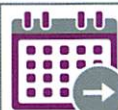
4, 5, and 10 are not signs of stress.



By the Numbers

71 percent of adults report at least one symptom of stress, including anxiety, a headache, or feeling overwhelmed.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Next Month's Topic:

Healthy weight