Are your holidays a time of joy or hassles? Many of us find extra demands at holiday time stressful, even if there are plenty of activities to enjoy as well. Tension can come from:

- Higher expenses
- Memories of past losses or sad experiences
- Colds, flu, other illness
- More time with family
- Emotional lows or changes
- Too many activities and over scheduling
- Extra responsibilities
- Pressure to host the “perfect” dinner or party
- Gift overload or expectations

Fortunately, taking some time to plan your approach to the holiday season can result in a more relaxed experience.

Here are some techniques to try:

- Think about what's truly meaningful about the holidays, and make that your central focus. Whether it be religious services or volunteer work, meaningful connections and activities are a great antidotes to stress.
- Plan ahead for times that may be difficult for you. Shorten visits, or decline them altogether. When you can, postpone getting together until after the holidays.
- Put yourself at the top of your gift-giving list, and choose the gift of health. Exercise, fresh air, healthy eating and adequate rest are gifts money cannot buy.
- Keep spending under control by agreeing with others to limit the amount spent, or make a charitable donation. Another option is a gift of service, which will go a long way in stretching your dollars, and will also show the important people in your life that you care.
- Avoid too many sweets and limit alcohol. Both can contribute to emotional ups and downs.
- Choose which holiday events you will participate in, and let go of the guilt of not doing it all. Whatever you choose, immerse yourself in it and enjoy!

When unhappy, sad, or stressed feelings come up, share them with a trusted friend or counselor. It’s okay to feel sad sometimes, but if these feelings persist or interfere with daily life, call your health care and/or EAP provider for help.

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