

# 10 tips for heading off stress during the holidays

December 22 2010

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Wondering if you'll be able to survive the stress of the holidays — the meals, the presents, reliving old times, and all that togetherness?

Hal Barkley, Director of Counseling in SMU's Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development, says not to panic. You can survive this. Here are some of his tips:

1) Create boundaries. Say you had an embarrassing nickname when you were a kid and your pesky brother keeps bringing it up. What to do? Tell him you're looking forward to seeing him, but you'd appreciate it if he wouldn't call you that, at least not in front of anyone else.

2) Lower your exercise expectations. If you usually work out for an hour a day, be comfortable less.

3) Being alone is OK. Getting away for a while is fine. Do not feel guilty about needing some space and time alone.

"You need to get away, to rediscover yourself, to recharge your batteries," Barkley says. Use his trick: When his mother runs out of buttermilk, he says, "Oh! I'll go get that for you!"

4) You can still love them even if they don't stay with you. You might even find yourselves a bit more enamored of each other.

"Some people bring their own RV or mobile home," he says. "That's

where they stay. I always think maybe there's a reason for that. It gives them space. So does staying in a hotel rather than someone's home."

5) Focus on merely maintaining your weight. If you don't gain pounds, consider yourself successful. If you crave some candy, go ahead and have a piece.

6) It's your house; you set the rules. If relatives tend to drink too much, talk to them beforehand, Barkley says: "Confrontation doesn't have to be negative; it can be positive. It can be a setting of expectations."

7) You don't have to eat any more than you want to eat. It's a matter of breaking a pattern. Before the meal, for instance, tell your mother or sister or that favorite relative: "One thing I look forward to is coming here and eating your cooking. But I want you to know that this year, I'm going to try everything but will only have one helping. Don't be surprised if you have to say 'No thank you' several times."

8) Create active traditions. If sliding doesn't fit your climate, consider bowling or going out to look at Christmas lights.

9) Make your meals last a long time. No, not by having those seconds you swore off in No. 7. But by eating dessert after a rousing game or charades or Twister.

10) Channel your frustrations altruistically. If you can't stand another minute – or even long before you reach that point – volunteer. Do it alone, or bring the family along.

Provided by Southern Methodist University

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2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-12-stress-holidays.html>

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