

Six mental health tips for a stress-free festive season

December 22 2017, by Lauren Phillips



Plan a game night with friends and family over the break, for some low-key fun and relaxation. Credit: Pixabay photo by Nietjuh

This holiday season, we asked Darren Ferleyko, director of Staff Wellness at the University of Calgary, to give us his top six tips to have a healthy, restful holiday break.

1. Avoid overscheduling

Although being social and connecting with those around us is an important part of overall wellness, spreading yourself too thin leads to

increased stress and anxiety. "We have a tendency to take on too much over the holidays, committing to too many events and activities," explains Ferleyko. "We need to set realistic expectations and prioritize our time to make sure we aren't over-scheduled." Be honest with yourself about what's reasonable this [holiday season](#), remember that it's okay if everything isn't 'perfect,' and learn to say no when you're maxed out.

2. All things in moderation

Tasty treats, sugary sweets and cocktails are tempting—especially at this time of year. However, overindulgence in food and alcohol can take a major toll on your health. Balance your diet with nutritional food and plenty of water to keep your body healthy and happy. If you do plan on popping the champagne or sipping on rum and eggnog, avoid overdoing it by knowing your limit and staying within it.

3. Take time for yourself

For many, the holidays are about spending time with family. However, Ferleyko points out that for some, family fights can be as common as festivities. "Personality conflicts between family members are a major source of stress and anxiety," he says. "With all the events and activities over the holidays, we often forget to make time for ourselves." Treating yourself to much needed 'me time' with self-care activities like practising mindfulness techniques, sneaking some extra shut-eye, getting off the grid and unplugging from technology, engaging in year-end reflection, or curling up with a book are good ways to relax and take care of mental health.

4. Spend smart

Between gifts, food and travel costs, the holidays are an expensive time of year. "Plan in advance, set a budget and stick to it, reduce your need to purchase presents through gift exchanges and remember that handmade gifts are always meaningful yet cost effective," suggests Ferleyko. Avoid the stress that comes with breaking the bank by spending smart this holiday season.

5. Make new traditions

While we often think of the holidays as the happiest time of year, for many the end of December can be incredibly lonely. "For those who have lost loved ones or those without family nearby, there may be feelings of isolation, sadness and depression during the holidays," says Ferleyko. Remember there's no right or wrong way to celebrate. Make the holidays meaningful to you by starting your own traditions and focusing on activities that bring you joy. Ideas include baking cookies, taking a stroll to see the Christmas lights in your neighbourhood, watching your favourite holiday movie or volunteering in the community.

6. Get moving

It can be tough to find the [time](#), but even with the hustle and bustle of the [holiday](#) season it's important to stay active. Whether it's going for a walk with family or friends, hitting the gym or exploring the outdoors, just 30 minutes of exercise helps manage stress, boost energy and mood, and reduce anger, tension and fatigue—so put down the remote and get up off the couch!

Provided by University of Calgary

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