

3 tips from a psychologist on managing holiday stress

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The holidays can be a whirlwind of stress.

Packed airports, bad traffic, exhausting parties. Cooking big meals,

struggling to afford gifts, navigating complicated relationships with family.

The list goes on and on.

A recent American Psychiatric Association poll found that 31% of U.S. adults say they expect to be more stressed during the [holidays](#) this year than they were last year. Many are worried about being able to afford presents.

Rising prices are expected to dampen [holiday](#) spending as families weather the pandemic's economic fallout.

Elyssa Barbash, a Tampa psychologist, has three tips on how to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

Take a breather

Spending a significant amount of time with family can be a "huge stressor" for some people, said Barbash, who owns Tampa Therapy, a group practice. She specializes in treating [post-traumatic stress disorder](#), depression and anxiety, among other things.

"Carve out some 'alone time,'" she recommended, "even if it's like 20 minutes, twice a day. ... You need that decompression."

In other words, if you're cooking Christmas dinner for lots of relatives, take a breather when you can. Walk around the block. Enjoy the Florida sun.

Don't ditch your routine

If you have a daily routine of exercising, reading, meditating or practicing some other form of self-care, don't ditch it, Barbash said.

"It's easy to let those kinds of things fall to the wayside during the [holiday season](#) if you're traveling" or spending time with family, she said. "But I think it's important to keep up with the things that make us feel well."

She also urged people to not be hard on themselves if they miss a scheduled run or forget to journal in the evening like usual.

"Don't beat yourself up," Barbash said, "and then not do it at all."

Do the activity the next day.

Appreciate what you have

If someone is stressed about [holiday shopping](#), cleaning or a similar issue, they can reframe their thinking, Barbash said, to something like this:

"While it can be overwhelming, the fact that I have all of (this) to do means that I have people around me that I feel close to. ... We care about one another. We get to spend time together."

The American Psychological Association also notes that people can spend time alone to reflect on things that bring them joy, go for a long walk, get a massage, listen to their favorite music or read a new book.

"All of us need some time to recharge our batteries," the association says. "Be mindful and focus on the present rather than dwell on the past or worry about the future."

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