

# Survey: From inflation to world affairs, stressors pile up for Americans this holiday season

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A national survey by The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center finds stressors around everything from inflation to world affairs are piling up for Americans. Psychologist Nicole Hollingshead, PhD, says stopping to consider what you can plan for and what is outside of your control can help manage stress and protect your mental health this holiday season. Credit: The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

The season of comfort and joy is upon us, but a new survey finds that for many Americans, it's the season of stress and worry. A new survey commissioned by The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and College of Medicine finds Americans are feeling the strain from inflation and world affairs this year, in addition to other stressors that often come with the holidays.

Of the 1,007 survey respondents, 81% said that national issues and world affairs are causing them stress. In addition, 75% of respondents are experiencing stress from rising prices and holiday spending and 53% are stressed from increasing cases of respiratory illnesses across the nation such as the flu and COVID-19. Memories of last year's holiday travel meltdown have 44% of [survey respondents](#) stressed out.

While they can be stressful, the [holidays](#) are supposed to be a time for families and friends to connect and recharge, said Nicole Hollingshead, Ph.D., a psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health at the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center.

"The holidays kind of bring on this feeling of sadness and struggle when we really want it to be more of a joyous time," said Hollingshead. "I encourage people to reflect on what the holidays meant for you growing up. And most of the time I don't hear people reflect on, "I loved having all the presents, or I remember every single thing that someone gave me." Instead, it's more of the feeling of the holidays."

People who are stressed out should take a step back and tackle holiday stress by taking charge of what they 'can' control.

When someone is feeling overwhelmed, Hollingshead says it's time to **STOP:**

Slow down.

Take a few deep breaths.

Observe the issue.

Proceed with a rational plan.

The survey asked questions about these specific topics, and Hollingshead offers tips to help cope with each stressor:

- Inflation and holiday spending: Rising prices are out of your control, but you can discuss your budget with your family or partner ahead of time and make plans to reduce spending.
- National/World affairs: The constant stream of headlines about [violent crime](#), [political controversy](#) and escalating international conflicts is negatively affecting Americans' mental health. While there's not much we can do to control these things, we can control our exposure to it. Limit the time spent watching TV news and avoid doom scrolling through online news stories and social media.
- Rise in seasonal respiratory diseases: Mitigating your risk is the best way to protect you and your family from illnesses like COVID and the flu. Make sure you are caught up on recommended vaccinations, set clear boundaries about being around people who are feeling sick and wash your hands frequently.
- Unreliable travel industry—When it comes to travel, hope for the best, but prepare for the worst. You can't control [traffic jams](#) or flight delays, but you can ensure all your phones and devices are

charged up in case you're stranded for a while. Always have a plan B in case things go wrong. Be flexible and find ways to enjoy your time together even if your travel doesn't go as planned.

While it's common to feel stress around the holidays, Hollingshead encourages people to avoid emotional spending fueled by advertising messages that tap into desires for a picture-perfect holiday. That desire for perfection often deters from holiday joy, she said.

"It gets close to the holidays, and I worry: 'Did I buy enough for my family? Did I do enough?' And so we can lose sight of the importance of having too many gifts or making sure everybody has enough to unwrap. Then we lose sight of the big picture, which is that time together."

## **Study results and methodology**

This study was conducted on behalf of The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center by SSRS on its Opinion Panel Omnibus platform. The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is a national, twice-per-month, probability-based survey. Data collection was conducted from Oct. 20–23 among a sample of 1,007 respondents.

The survey was conducted via web (n=977) and telephone (n=30) and administered in English. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus data are weighted to represent the target population of U.S. adults ages 18 or older.

Provided by Ohio State University Medical Center

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