

Dial down your holiday stress

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Start by setting realistic expectations, experts advise.

(HealthDay)—From crowded shopping malls to unpaid bills to an onslaught of out-of-town guests, the holidays can cause overwhelming stress. One way to remain calm is to manage unrealistic expectations, experts advise.

"Overly high expectations for the [holidays](#)—be it around the food, the gifts or the [family relationships](#)—can trigger anxiety and even depression," said Dr. Mallay Occhiogrosso, a psychiatrist at the Payne Whitney Clinic at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York City, in a medical center news release. "Prioritizing self-care is important, as well as dialing down those unrealistic 'Hallmark holiday' fantasies."

Another expert agrees: "During the holidays, our lives become even more stressful as we try to juggle our usual responsibilities with extra holiday preparation and complicated [family dynamics](#)," said Dr. Maria Oquendo, a psychiatrist at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center.

The experts noted there are several other ways to avoid stress during the holidays, including:

- **Find support.** People facing difficult [family](#) situations should set aside time to spend with their friends. Those who feel isolated

or alone should take advantage of resources in their community or volunteer their time at a local charity.

- **Get some alone time.** Even a 15-minute break can help you relax and relieve [stress](#). Taking a brisk walk or getting some exercise can significantly improve your mood.
- **Set limits.** You can't do everything, so do only what you enjoy. Allow friends and family members to share their ideas about what they would like to do during the holidays.
- **Reduce shopping stress.** Set a budget and do not spend more than you intend. Don't let guilt, competitiveness or perfectionism send you on more shopping excursions than you would like.
- **Enlist help.** Let your friends and family contribute to the holiday preparations.
- **Be realistic.** Don't set your holiday expectations too high. Allow your loved ones to be themselves and set any conflicts aside for another time.
- **Reflect on the past.** Honor and remember loved ones who have passed away.
- **Be organized.** Plan meals, shopping lists and other activities in advance so you have more time to enjoy the holidays.
- **Remember what's important.** Spend some time focusing on family, religious beliefs or traditions.

Anyone who still feels depressed during the holidays should consider talking to a mental-health professional, the experts noted.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more [holiday health tips](#).

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