

Handling Holiday Stress

The holidays can be a joyful time, spending quality time with family and friends. However, the holidays can also be a stressful and challenging time for many people. There are more financial, family and social demands and there never seems to be enough time to get everything done. It is a time when people spend more money, eat more food and drink more alcohol. Drinking is more accepted and expected this time of year, with social gatherings and parties. It can be a risky and dangerous time of year. There are more alcohol-related accidents or death, and there is a greater risk of relapse for people in recovery.

These added pressures can be quite overwhelming, particularly for people living with mental health or addiction issues, and their families. Here are some guidelines to help reduce holiday stress, while staying safe during the holiday season.

1. Spend time with friends and family.
2. Enjoy foods you love. Choose a balance between healthy foods as well as treats.
3. Set priorities for budgeting. Set a limit on how much you plan to spend.
4. Give support to others.
5. Share tasks and responsibilities. You do not have to do everything yourself.
6. Maintain a regular sleep and meal schedule.
7. If you are hosting a party, you are responsible for your guests. Please remember to:
 - a. Offer non-alcoholic drinks
 - b. Serve alcohol as opposed to having an open bar.
 - c. Monitor your own use – drink moderately or not at all.
 - d. Ensure no one operates any motorized vehicle when they leave your home.
 - e. Report impaired drivers to the police immediately. You could be held responsible if you knowingly allow someone to leave your home and drive while under the influence of any substance.
8. Dealing with pressure to drink – even though alcohol may be available at every event you attend, does not mean you have to accept. Ask instead for a glass of pop, water, or any other non-alcoholic drink.
9. Have a plan in place for how you will get home safely. Use a designated driver, take a cab, walk, give someone your keys or call a family member or friend. Make a safe and sober decision to not drink and drive.
10. Practice responsible drinking:
 - a. Set a limit, and stick with it.
 - b. Eat before and while you are drinking.
 - c. Alternate alcohol with non-alcoholic drinks.
 - d. Pace and space your drinks (have no more than 2 drinks in any 3 hours).

If you are in recovery, there are some things you can do to maintain sobriety. Have a support person whom you can rely on during tempting or difficult times. Do not go to an event you are nervous about. Have a back-up plan if you are at a party. Tell the hosts you have another commitment or cannot stay long. Continue to attend 12-step meetings such as AA, GA, or NA (if you attend) or meet with your counsellor (if you have one).

No matter the issues you are struggling with this holiday season, remember, help and support are available. You can make healthy responsible choices, talk to family and friends and ask for support. Never feel embarrassed to ask for help or to seek professional support.

If you are experiencing a difficult time during the holiday season and need support, contact your local Mental Health and Addiction Services office, your local hospital, the Mental Health Crisis Line (1-888-737-4668), or the NL Health Line (1-888-709-2929).

The staff from Mental Health and Addiction Services would like to wish you all a safe and joyous holiday season.

Article submitted by:

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