

CWS Staff Picks

Holiday Stress Management Tips

The following are tips to stress-less during the holidays – compiled by former UIWC student staff members Paula Chmiel and Samantha Slutzky:

Use a one-page calendar to keep track of festivities. Doing so will give you a visual reminder of what you have to look forward to, as well as show you when you're free to take care of other duties.

Write out a To-Do list. Prioritize things you care about most. Do them as soon as you are free.

Make fitness part of your holiday tradition. Stage a post-holiday meal snowball fight or neighborhood walk, go ice-skating or bowling to get your heart rate up while enjoying family and friends.

Shop on weekdays between Black Friday and mid-December. According to ShopperTrak (a company that analyzes foot traffic data in retail settings), this is the least crowded time to shop. You also may save money since stores are trying to sell Black Friday leftovers and other items in off-peak times.

Pause and breathe. Take two minutes to refresh with few deep breaths. Inhale fully through your nose until you can't take in any more air, pause, then exhale the stress out through your mouth, imaging all your stress flowing out of your body with your breath. This reduces the tension you may have been ignoring.

Be realistic. Do not plan to do more than is reasonable for one person to do. It is okay to politely decline some invitations. Choose activities that mean the most to you. And don't worry about everything going perfectly. Just seize the opportunities this time of year brings – and enjoy!

Laugh. Laughing decreases stress, while increasing a type of white blood cell that fights infection. That's reason enough to pop in a funny movie like Home Alone into the DVD player!

Sleep 7-9 hours each night. Being fully rested gives you the energy to keep up with the hectic holiday pace, protects you from colds and flu, and reduces stress.

Indulge only in food that is special and/or worth it. Just because a piece of chocolate is wrapped in red or green foil does not make it different from the silver ones you can eat all year. Same with store-bought pies and rolls. Save the calories for your dad's famous stuffing or a homemade gingerbread cookie.

Appreciate people the way they are. Relationships can be difficult at any time of the year. The holidays may heighten family misunderstandings or conflict, so think before making negative comments that might hurt someone.

Acknowledge your feelings and need for support if you are separated from family/friends or have suffered a loss. Take advantage of social supports you have.

Sweat While You Shop. Turn your holiday shopping into an exercise session. Park in the back of the lot, or power-walk around the mall a few times before you begin bargain-hunting.

Control expenses. Holiday gift spending can be a stressful endeavor. Make a budget for yourself and plan before you go shopping to avoid spontaneous spending.

Try this instant stress reducer. Close your eyes, take three long, slow breaths, and spend a few seconds picturing a relaxing scene.

Relax with aromatherapy. Oils of anise, basil, bay, chamomile, eucalyptus, lavender, peppermint, rose, and thyme are all soothing, and relieve stress quickly.

Create realistic expectations. It is easy to get caught up in the idealistic images of everyone being happy together, sleigh bells, snowflakes and the sounds of laughter and music in the air. As an alternative, think through your plans and be realistic about the commitments you make and the goals you set for the holiday.

Set Realistic Fitness Goals. The holidays tend to be busy, and it might not be realistic for you to get in your customary amount of exercise. Temporarily modify your goals to something achievable. Make a specific commitment and plan to return to your usual physical activity program right after the holidays.