

Stress-Reducing Strategies for the Holidays

The holiday season can be an especially stressful time of year. Our expectations about family togetherness, finding the perfect gifts for loved ones, saying yes to extra obligations, overspending and overindulging in food and alcohol can lead to a disappointing holiday season. The following are some tips to help you manage your own responses to the holidays and increase your enjoyment during this special time of year.

1. **Create realistic expectations.** It is easy to get caught up in the idealistic images of everyone being happy together, sleigh bells, snow flakes 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.
2. **Learn to say no.** As your calendar fills up, you will find you have less time for the things that really matter to you and for those you love. People will understand if you are unable to accept an invitation. By being mindful of how you plan to spend your time, you can prioritize your obligations and make conscious choices. Create a calendar so you can spend time with those you love and attend events that are meaningful to you.
3. **Balance your spending.** Avoid impulse spending on gifts, food and entertainment. That way you will avoid post season regret when the bills come rolling in.
4. **Be flexible.** As families change and grow, traditions may need to change as well. Hang on to those family rituals such as a special food or activity and understand that some may no longer be possible. Perhaps your entire family can't gather at your house. You may have to share children and grandchildren with extended family.
5. **Accept family members and friends as they are.** Relationships can be difficult at any time of the year. The holidays can heighten family misunderstandings or conflict.
6. **Acknowledge your feelings and need for support.** If you are separated from family or friends or have suffered the loss of a loved one, acknowledge your feelings of grief and allow yourself to express these feelings. Take advantage of the social supports that you have in place. Volunteer at a community or religious function. Getting involved and helping others can be a great way to lift your spirits and make new acquaintances.

7. **Maintain healthy habits.** Don't be pressured to eat or drink in excess just because it is the holiday season. Before attending parties or social events, choose how much and what types of foods and beverages you plan to consume. Get plenty of sleep and schedule time for physical activity.
8. **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad, anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, feeling
9. irritable, hopeless and unable to face daily routines. If these feeling last for several weeks, talk to your doctor, a mental health professional, or your Faculty/Staff Assistance Program. It always helps to talk and regain your perspective on your life.

Campus resource: The Faculty Staff Assistance Program

The Faculty/Staff Assistance Program is located at 1011 W. Springfield Ave. Urbana, IL 61801. The staff of the FSAP is dedicated to providing quality, confidential assistance to employees and their families who may be experiencing difficulties that impact their lives. This includes assessments, short-term counseling, crisis services and referrals to appropriate resources.

The FSAP offers this benefit free of charge to all faculty, staff, retirees and family members or significant others living in their household. The FSAP staff is composed of licensed professionals who offer assessment, brief counseling and if necessary, referrals to appropriate resources.

You can reach the office at 217-244-5312 or fsap@illinois.edu. The office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. A crisis line is available after hours and on weekends and holidays. The crisis number is 217-244-7739.