

Balanced Living - December 2014

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A Guide to Holiday Survival



For many, the holidays are a time to share in the joy of family traditions and create new special memories. But for some, these expectations can make holidays stressful, especially for those that feel disconnected from family or friends, those that feel alone, or those that may be suffering from seasonal affective disorder. Regardless of your situation, some degree of stress and tension around the holidays should be expected. Consider some of these suggestions to help prepare you for this busy time of year and make the holidays a special time in your own way.

Create Your Own Traditions

The holidays are directly connected to the traditions of the past. When those traditions are additionally connected to painful or troubling memories, it's time to create healthy traditions of your own. Think of new events you can participate in on your own or invite new people to join you in an old tradition. Make a point to keep your new traditions alive each year, and they will start to add happy memories to your holiday spirit.

Be a Participant

Sometimes what you need are good friends around you. Look for opportunities to get involved in holiday activities that get you out having fun with friends and family. Attend parties, invite friends to local activities, or even take a trip to some regional events. A little holiday spirit can go a long way.

Ask for Others to Chip In

Just because you are hosting the holiday event does not mean everyone else gets to sit back and do nothing. Remember, the true meaning of holidays often comes down to sharing the holiday experience with the ones you love and feeling thankful and blessed. Welcome everyone to share his or her favorite recipe or bring a game that helps unite everyone. Getting together on a holiday because of tradition is one thing, but joining families and creating new memories and traditions will bring you closer and make the time you spend together more meaningful.

Keep Your Life in Focus

It can be easy to focus on what you don't have, and not what you do have, during the holidays. Make a point to celebrate the good things in your life. Contact your friends and remind them of how much you value their friendship and support. Another great way to remind yourself of how fortunate you are is to volunteer at a local charity or food kitchen to help others and give back to your community.

Be Willing to Get Help

The holiday blues can be difficult to manage for anyone, but for some, they can be especially limiting and inhibit your ability to function regularly. If you need help, talk to someone – a friend, a loved one, or a trained counselor. Talking about how you're feeling and what triggers those feelings can teach you new ways to cope and can help keep your holiday blues at bay.

Krames Staywell

Get Real Behind the Wheel



The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) blames inattentive or distracted drivers for up to 30 percent of motor vehicle crashes -- an estimated 1.2 million a year.

In a study by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC), drivers knew they were being watched. Yet 15 percent drove distracted.

The study found that drivers were most often distracted by something outside their vehicle, followed by adjusting a radio or CD player, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, which funded the study. Other distractions included talking with other people in the car, adjusting heating or air conditioning controls, eating or drinking, using a cell phone and smoking.

Different age groups seemed to be distracted by different things, the study said. Drivers under 20 were most often distracted by tuning the radio or changing CDs; young adults were most often distracted by other passengers; older drivers (older than 65) were most often distracted by objects or events happening outside the vehicle.

"We want people to see driving as the number one task and try to minimize all other activities," says Scott Osberg, Ph.D., director of research for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "Driving is no time to be multitasking."

What to do

OK, you've been told since you began driving to keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel. But what should and shouldn't you do?

For one thing, don't use a cell phone while driving. Cell phones that make you punch in the numbers and functions are bad enough. But even with supposedly safer, hands-free, speech-activated models, "there has been research showing that the biggest problem is cognitive distraction," says Jane Stutts, Ph.D., HSRC's manager of epidemiological studies and coauthor of its distracted driving study. "People talking on the phone ... are not aware of cars and what's going on around them."

The right way: Make the call before you begin driving or after you pull off in a safe place, she says.

It's the same with chatty passengers or cranky kids. Don't get so caught up that you lose track of what you're doing. Rather than turning around to calm or discipline the little ones, Dr. Osberg says, "Pull over if it's serious and they persist."

Some objects in a car have become more complex, so they're more distracting. Car radios were once fairly simple. "Now," Dr. Stutts says, "it's 15 buttons and scans and seeks and CDs."

Our eating habits have changed, too. "The sheer number of drive-through restaurants means people are doing more eating and drinking in cars," Dr. Stutts says. Adds Dr. Osberg: "A pretzel in the car is OK. A bowl of soup is not the best idea."

Smoking, primping, reading, writing, rubbernecking -- even new navigation systems that make you look down at the screen -- can all distract you. "Anytime you look away from the road, it is a danger," Dr. Osberg says.

Krames Staywell

How You Can Get a Better Night's Sleep



Despite common belief, aging doesn't cause sleep problems, and seniors don't need less sleep as they grow older.

Most older people sleep poorly, or not long enough, because of ailments associated with aging, such as arthritis, physical disabilities, respiratory problems and depression.

Lack of exercise, heart disease, anxiety, stress and menopause also can disrupt sleep, and many medications seniors take can cause insomnia.

Changing patterns

"Many people believe that sleeping poorly is just part of growing old. In fact, seniors who fall asleep during the day do so because they aren't getting enough quality sleep at night," says Sonia Ancoli-Israel, M.D., director of the Sleep Disorders Clinic at the San Diego Veterans Affairs Medical Center in California.

Though the need for eight hours of sleep each night doesn't change with age, sleep patterns do. The body's circadian rhythm, a biological clock that controls sleep, naturally advances a few hours as a person grows older. When that happens, older people may feel sleepy earlier in the evening and wake up earlier in the morning. By observing their natural sleep patterns and making lifestyle changes, seniors can help keep their internal clocks on time and overcome sleep problems.

Sleep remedies

Sleep and aging experts agree that one's daytime activities and sleep environment are critical to getting a good night's sleep.

Try the following remedies if you have trouble sleeping.

- Stick to a regular sleep schedule. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Ask your doctor if any of your medications could be disturbing your sleep.
- Stay active. Maintain a moderate level of daily activity and do gentle exercise.
- Spend some time outdoors during daylight hours. Sunlight can help set your biological clock.
- Pay attention to what you eat and drink in the evening. Consuming foods and drinks that contain caffeine, such as coffee, tea or cola can interfere with nighttime sleep.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages in the evening. They can make you fall asleep faster, but they cause early morning awakenings and fitful sleep.
- Don't smoke. Smokers are more likely to have trouble sleeping than nonsmokers.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet and cool.
- Replace your mattress if it's lumpy, sagging or worn out. A comfortable mattress that offers good support can help you fall asleep and stay asleep.
- Ask a doctor for help if your partner snores or has an illness that disturbs your sleep.

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