

Your EAP|Here4TN! for you and your family

PARTNERS
FOR HEALTH
EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

Beating stress this holiday season

The winter holiday season usually generates festive feelings and fun. It can also bring stress and exhaustion. At this time of year, people often find themselves trying to keep up with shopping, decorating, cooking, kids' school events, work functions and other celebratory gatherings. With so much going on, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Here are some simple ideas for cutting holiday stress.

- **Don't seek perfection.** People often maintain an idealized image of how the holidays should be. However, everything about your holiday season doesn't have to be perfect or just like last year. There are usually many things out of your control, so don't set your bar of expectations too high.
- **Simplify wherever possible.** Be realistic about what you can do prior to and during the holidays. Trim some tasks or social functions so that you have more time to enjoy the season and the people you value most.
- **Get help.** Share your challenges with those around you. Delegate some tasks to family, friends or coworkers, as appropriate. Brainstorm for shortcuts to getting things done.
- **Get sunlight.** Although it's harder to take in much sunlight during the winter, strive to get as much as possible. Sun exposure helps produce feel-good serotonin and can relieve seasonal depression that affects some people at this time of year.
- **Get rest.** Don't let your schedule get so off kilter that you neglect to get an adequate amount of sleep.
- **Keep exercising.** Try to keep the change in schedules from curtailing your exercise routine. Exercise helps relieve stress and burn off calories that accumulate quickly at this time of year. (See the article on page 2.)
- **Make needed changes.** Take time to identify the things that have caused stress for you during past holidays. Develop a new plan for handling them this year. For example, if it's hard to visit everyone in your family on a single day, plan to visit one of your destinations on a different day this year.

If you're overwhelmed, reach out. If your holiday-related stress seems too much, contact your ParTNers EAP at **1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486)** or online at **www.Here4TN.com** any time (24/7) for confidential, no-cost counseling and resources.

Do you feel creeping tension when just *considering* all you need to do this holiday season?

Often we over-schedule and over-commit during the holidays, leaving little opportunity for us to truly celebrate the peaceful pleasures of the season. Better to keep things simple and let go of activities that no longer fit your family's current situation.

However you celebrate, it's important to take care of your physical and mental health throughout the holidays. It's also good to practice moderation in your celebrating. This helps you maintain balance despite the sometimes odd holiday hours you may keep.

This newsletter provides holiday ideas to help you:

- Reduce stress through activities that relax instead of tax you.
- Stay on track with exercising, and achieve control in your holiday eating.
- Learn how to feel better if the holiday blues are impacting you.

Access your ParTNers EAP any time at **1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486)** or online at **www.Here4TN.com**.



Relaxing amidst a busy holiday time

With so many things to do, so many places to be, and so many others to keep happy during the typical holiday season, it's easy to get worn out. Here are some ideas for incorporating relaxation into your holidays.

- **Take healthy breaks.** Plan to take some time between holiday tasks to rest, recharge and clear your mind. Put this time on your calendar if need be. See a movie, read a book, or just set aside some quiet meditative time to fully slow down before the start of the new year.
- **Unplug and be present.** Although no one wants to miss those all-important text messages, take some occasional time over the holidays to avoid your devices. Remaining ever-responsive to cellphone buzzes can actually be stressful, so try going off the grid now and then. Fully experience quiet moments.
- **Celebrate the outdoors.** Take a long walk or nature hike (particularly after holiday meals) in the brisk air. Step outside at night for a few minutes of stargazing.
- **Schedule an alternative health session.** This could be a massage, acupuncture, or energy work via reiki. Or, take a long, candle-lit soak in the tub with bath fragrances or salts, and put on some soothing music in the background.
- **Revisit that neglected project.** Plan to focus on a creative activity you've wanted to pursue but haven't had much time for during the year.
- **Say "no" sometimes; it's okay!** Agreeing to participate in too many activities can leave you feeling strained and resentful. Family, friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every activity.
- **Adopt a relaxation technique.** Relaxation exercises can relieve tension and help you recover from stress over the holidays. Practice a technique such as deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, imagery/visualization or yoga.



Exercise and eat smart!

Here are some holiday-healthy tips.

Follow an eating and fitness plan.

Amidst all the holiday treats, strive to track your food intake and activity levels. This way you'll be more aware of calories as they accumulate. Plus, if you decide to enjoy some higher-calorie options, you'll be motivated to make adjustments such as taking smaller portions to meet your daily caloric goals.

Don't slouch into the couch. After your holiday meal, take a walk or do a workout to burn off some of those calories.

Beware the beverages. Remember that even though your favorite holiday adult beverage doesn't have an affixed nutrition label, it's probably quite calorie-laden.

Take your time eating and enjoying the holiday flavors. Chewing your food more slowly allows the "hungry-full" response from your brain to tell you that you're satisfied—which takes approximately 20 minutes. If you eat too quickly, you'll likely eat too much.

If you need some extra support, contact your ParTNers Wellness Program at 888-741-3390. Professional support is available for exercise, nutrition, stress and many other areas that affect your health.

When depression accompanies the holidays

Many elements of the holiday season including unrealistic expectations, financial pressures, an excess of commitments, substance use and even loneliness can trigger feelings of depression. For many people, it's not all "comfort and joy" at holiday time.

In addition, approximately five percent of the population suffers the serious depressive episodes of seasonal affective disorder (seasonal depression) around the winter holidays. This disorder can be caused by a lack of exposure to sunlight. Getting more sunlight intake or doing bright light therapy (phototherapy) with a light box can help.

Those suffering from any type of holiday depression can benefit from increased social contact and support during this time of year. Counseling, medications and support groups also make a positive difference. Contact your ParTNers EAP for information on the right treatment options for you.

Isolation can be a problem for some people suffering with depression. If you don't have plans with others, make an effort to head out and join in the seasonal fun one way or another. You can find public celebrations or volunteer opportunities where you can serve those less fortunate.



Coping with holiday blues... online

Oftentimes we're too busy to stop and make an appointment for the kind of health and wellness services we may need—and this certainly applies during the busy holiday time. If you get the blues this holiday season, remember that you have access to confidential, web-based therapy.

MoodCalmer is a self-guided online program that can help you understand the signs and symptoms of depression, challenge the negative thoughts typically linked to depression, learn how to feel better, and manage any relapses you might experience.

Available to you at no cost, MoodCalmer is a self-paced program that helps encourage positive thinking and resilience—in four short, interactive, online sessions. It's a medication-free solution with easy-to-follow instructions. You can access it anytime, anywhere, plus it's fully private and confidential.

Just go to www.Here4TN.com. Create a username and password with your program's toll-free number and click on the *web-based care* option under the *benefits* tab.

Additional sources: Mayo Clinic, Psych Central.

www.Here4TN.com | 1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486)

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