

# Compass

## Stay balanced this holiday season

Have your recent holiday seasons been more about stress than about comfort and joy? Perhaps you've gotten pulled in too many directions, ate and drank too much, attended too many events, and have generally gotten worn out. Can there be a better way this year?

If you approach this year's holidays by making a commitment to balance, you might be able to better enjoy the celebrations, gatherings and gift exchanges of the season. Taking care of your physical and mental health through the holiday period is a vital part of navigating numerous holiday happenings.

One good way to start is to think about the things that have caused you stress during past holidays, and devise a new plan for handling them this year.

In this winter holiday-themed edition of *Compass*, we explore:

- Strategies you can use to avoid the stress that family gatherings sometimes create.
- Ways to stay more balanced and cope with the effects of depression if it is darkening your holiday season.
- Tips on how to unplug from the more stressful aspects of the holidays.

**Log on and learn!** Look for *Holiday Survival* on [www.EAP4YOU.com](http://www.EAP4YOU.com) under the Library/In the Spotlight section. You can access practical ideas and information that can help you enjoy a healthier, happier holiday season this year.



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## Ideas for handling family stress

Here are a few tips on how to avoid some of the stressors that can accompany family holiday celebrations.

- Hot topics like politics and religion can derail the fun of family gatherings. If a discussion gets heavy, defuse it with humor or just change the subject.
- Don't use holiday celebrations to confront others.
- Be sensitive to people's need for private space. Give everyone (including yourself) the opportunity to step aside for some private time.
- When planning holiday get-togethers, try to ensure that no one feels forced to continue a tradition they no longer enjoy. Discuss specific activities in advance; if you can't agree on making changes, maybe it's best to make other plans for this year.
- Establish your boundaries. You can say no to certain requests, and you can exit a gathering if someone in your family needs a break.

# Coping with holiday depression

It's well known that stress and depression can spike during the winter holidays. A combination of too many commitments, too little rest, financial concerns, and impractical expectations can combine to take a heavy toll on you. In addition, illnesses such as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) can make holiday time more difficult. Here are some pointers for coping.

## Don't seek holiday perfection

Remind yourself that everything about your holiday season doesn't have to be perfect or just like last year. There are many things out of your control, so don't set the bar of your expectations too high.

## Avoid isolation

If you don't have any plans with friends or family this year, 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 help those less fortunate.

## Remember those healthy habits

If you overdo it with eating and drinking, you may end up feeling guilty and stressed. Have a plan for holiday parties: snack beforehand, alternate drinks of water with other beverages, take smaller portions, and take a walk after big meals. If you have a workout plan, stay with it faithfully over the holidays. This will help cut stress and burn extra calories. Also remember to get enough rest and light exposure during this period.

## Make some time for yourself

Making an effort to unplug by yourself for short periods of relaxation between holiday tasks or events can help you stay in balance.

## Create new holiday traditions

If doing the same old holiday rituals each year has become stale for you, try celebrating in new ways that work better for your family in its current form.

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## Take time to enjoy it

*Set limits and keep it simple.* Be realistic about what you can do prior to and during the holidays. Avoid taking on too much or trying to visit everyone on the same day.

*Don't try to do it all.* Brainstorm for shortcuts to getting your to-do list completed, and delegate some tasks to family members.

*Schedule some "me" time.* See a movie, read a book, or schedule an alternative health session (e.g., massage, reiki, acupuncture) over the holidays. Or, just set aside some quiet meditative time and slow down.

*Get back to that fun project.* Plan to focus on a creative activity you've wanted to pursue but haven't had much time for during the year.

