

# HAPPY HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

Stay mentally healthy during the holidays and into the New Year with these tips.

BY SOPHIE TOLIAS

For many people, the holidays aren't as magical as they seem in the movies. Between overspending, bouncing from event to event, managing relatives and the countless tasks "necessary" for the "perfect" holiday, it's no wonder people lose sight of what keeps them mentally well throughout the rest of the year. Here's our mental health check list to help keep you centred as you prepare yourself for the festive season and beyond.

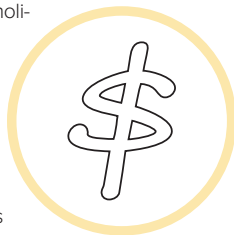
## 1 SET A BUDGET

Avoid holiday spending hangovers or sleepless nights spent poring over credit card bills come January by setting a budget and sticking to it. Rona

Birenbaum, a financial planner with Caring for Clients in Toronto, says it's important to include everything from gift wrap and hostess gifts to additional grocery expenses and travel costs. "Most people focus on the gift-giving and forget that there are so many other financial components to the holidays," she says.

Shop early to avoid desperate purchases, or shop online and leave items in the cart for a few days to avoid impulse buys. Pay cash for purchases and limit self-gifting whenever possible. And if the holidays are going to look different, don't stress, Birenbaum says—communicate. For example, explain to your children or other family members that you're redirecting some money normally spent on the holidays to their education savings plan.

"People are much more willing and able to understand a change when they know why [it's happening]," she says. Just talking about money woes alleviates stress, and teaching kids about finances at a young age is always a good idea.



## 2 MAINTAIN SELF-CARE

'Tis the season for healthy habits to go out the window, followed by that time of year when we vow to eat healthier, drink less and work out more. This yo-yoing is hard on our bodies, says Dr. Shawna Darou, a naturopathic doctor at Darou Wellness in Toronto. "My biggest advice during the holidays is to continue to maintain some degree of self-care and to prioritize it," she says.

That's not to say that you can't indulge at all, but focus on practicing moderation. "If you totally overdid it with the holiday meal the best thing to do is to get up in the morning and have a healthy breakfast and not let the whole thing snowball," Dr. Darou says.

Don't skip workouts to make room for seasonal activities, and if you don't have time for an hour-long spin class or to hit the gym, go for a brisk 15-minute walk or do a seven-minute workout at home.

It can be difficult to maintain a consistent sleep schedule with all the excitement, stress and late-night celebrations going on. But not catching enough Zs messes with your mood and stress levels, so prioritize sleep and hit the sack at a reasonable time each night.

"January comes and everybody is ready for a reset," says Dr. Darou. "It would be great to have a pattern where January comes and you're already still on your normal routine and you enjoyed the holidays."



## 3 REVIEW YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Expectations run high during the holidays. Dr. Darou suggests taking a step back and thinking about what the holidays are really about for you and whether all the expectations are necessary. If staying with family causes you stress, make hotel reservations or keep the visit short. Is shopping for a long list of gifts nobody actually needs stressful? Reframe the gift-giving tradition in your family (Secret Santa maybe?) or skip the presents and plan a holiday together instead. "I have a no-stress holiday meal tradition," She says. "We eat a lovely meal, but there's no big expectation on what time it is or what it has to look like. It's about the togetherness and I usually get everybody chipping in and preparing it together."

Focus on what matters—even if it means doing less. You'll enjoy the holidays more and you might even head into the New Year relaxed and ready to adjust some more traditions.



## 4 MAKE AN EFFORT TO CONNECT

If you're feeling lonely or isolated, watching people around you connect during the holidays can exacerbate the feeling. If you're surrounded by others but feeling emotionally isolated, choose one person and try connecting by chatting, going down memory lane or doing an activity together. If you're socially isolated, it's important to reach out to family, friends or acquaintances early to make sure you're not spending the holidays alone.

"Volunteering around the holidays can be a way to get out there, meet people and socialize, whether it's serving a holiday dinner or volunteering to wrap gifts at the mall," says Melanie McGregor from the Canadian Mental Health Association, Halton Region Branch. Charities are looking for volunteers throughout the year, especially after the influx of holiday volunteers tapers off, so consider volunteering for a few months or longer. Your time will be appreciated and it will help you feel connected and part of something bigger. 🗺️

