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# KNOW! HEALTHY WAYS TO HANDLE HOLIDAY STRESS

Ready or not, the holiday season is here! Along with the joy, traditions, and celebrations come full schedules and extra responsibilities. Family gatherings, shared meals, gift-giving, planning parties, school and religious events, and welcoming out-of-town guests can be wonderful, but they can also create some serious stress.

**So the real question is: How will you take care of yourself during this busy time?**

If your first instinct is to pour a glass of wine or crack open a cold beer, you're not alone. Many adults use alcohol as a way to relax. While an occasional drink can be a normal part of adult life, relying on alcohol to cope with stress can be harmful and sends a message to children that substances are a go-to solution for tough feelings.

Kids are always watching us, even in the small, everyday moments. When they see us reach for alcohol whenever we feel overwhelmed, worried, or down, they may come to believe that's what adults do. Instead, we can be powerful role models by practicing healthy ways to manage stress.

The Mayo Clinic offers a stress-reducing strategy called the 4 A's of stress management: Avoid, Alter, Accept, and Adapt. With any stressful situation, try using one or more of these strategies for yourself and your family.

## AVOID

Believe it or not, a lot of stress can be prevented. As best as you can, plan ahead, set boundaries, and let go of tasks that don't truly need your attention.

### HOLIDAY TIP: DON'T OVER-SCHEDULE YOURSELF

The holiday calendar fills up quickly. You might feel like you must be everywhere at once. Instead of trying to attend every event, choose the activities that matter most to you and your family. And remember, you're allowed to say no, even without a "good excuse." Protecting your time and energy is healthy, especially during stressful seasons.

## ALTER

Take a closer look at what's causing your stress and consider how you can adjust or improve the situation.

### HOLIDAY TIP: IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS

Gift-giving can be exciting, but it can also stretch the budget. If financial stress is creeping in, try taking a different approach. Small, thoughtful gifts or homemade treats show that you care, and can be even more meaningful. Making gifts together as a family can even become a holiday tradition to cherish year after year!

## ACCEPT

Sometimes, certain situations are out of our control. When that happens, we can focus on talking things out, practicing forgiveness, using positive self-talk, and learning from the experience.

### HOLIDAY TIP: RESPECT DIFFERENCES

Family conflicts can dampen the holiday spirit. When tensions rise, remind yourself that you can't control others, but you can control how you respond. Model good communication and healthy boundaries. If a conversation becomes overwhelming, it's okay to step away and take a breather.

## ADAPT

There are moments when adjusting our expectations, especially the unrealistic ones, can make all the difference. Ask yourself, "Will this matter a year from now?"

### HOLIDAY TIP: TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

If you're feeling stretched thin, give yourself permission to slow down. The season goes by quickly, and trying to do it all can leave you burned out instead of joyful. Let go of perfection, delegate when you can, and remember that traditions can evolve. Maybe someone else can host this year. Maybe a few items on your to-do list can wait. And if a relative's humor crosses the line, it's okay to speak up kindly and set a boundary. Give yourself and others grace as you refocus on what truly matters.

## RESOURCES

[Mayo Mindfulness: Try the 4 A's for stress relief](#) | Mayo Clinic

[10 tips to reduce stress and take care of yourself during the holidays](#) | UCDavis Health

[How to Reduce Holiday Stress for Kids—and Yourself](#) | University of Rochester Medical Center

[Tips for parents on managing holiday stress](#) | American Psychological Association

[9 tips to fend off holiday stress](#) | Mayo Clinic

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