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A wellness newsletter from your local EFAP.

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Love it or hate it, the holiday season has arrived. While some people thrive on the hustle and bustle of holiday preparations, others find this time of year overwhelming. This overwhelming feeling can be a result of time or money constraints, crowded shopping malls, family stresses or even memories (good or bad) of holidays past. In this issue of *live.work.well.*, we address some ways to deal with the stress of the season.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our member companies for your ongoing support of our EFAP. Your support allows us to help so many people each year that may otherwise not afford or access private counselling therapy.

All the best of health and wellness from us to you into 2020.

- The Upper Island Counselling Team



## Coping With Holiday Stress

December can be a challenging month for many of us, regardless of whether we love the holidays or hate them. There are many reasons why this is the case, but it can all, ultimately, be understood in terms of stress. Stress is an inevitable part of life – it can be part of things we regard as positive, like going on a vacation, and part of things we regard as negative, like losing a job. But, regardless of the source, one thing that all stress has in common is that it takes a toll on our energy.

When we bring the holidays into the equation, the stresses of life – both positive and negative – can get accelerated. December is filled with lights, decorations, music, movies, food, shopping, parties, parades, family gatherings, etc., etc. Regardless of whether these things are experienced as sources of joy or sources of dread, they can all be stressful and exhausting.

Therefore, it can be worthwhile to have some strategies and perspectives in place to help us cope with the stress of the holidays. Below are four ideas to help make your December as enjoyable as possible.

### 1) Practice Moderation

December is notoriously a month of excess. This can include over-spending, over-eating and over-drinking to name a few. Whenever we push ourselves into excess, it takes a toll on our well-being. Therefore, it is a good idea to pay attention to our tendencies to over-indulge, set reasonable limits for ourselves and abide by them.

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## Holiday Fun Facts:

- The largest gathering of people wearing holiday sweaters is 3,473, recorded at the University of Kansas on December 19, 2015, when people wore brightly coloured sweaters to a basketball game.
- Jelly doughnuts are a traditional Hanukkah treat. The biggest pile of these delicious treats was recorded on the first night of Hanukkah of 1997, when a 12-foot high pyramid made of 6,400 jelly doughnuts (called "soufganiyot" in Hebrew), was erected near the Israeli town of Afula. Afterwards, the doughnuts were distributed to Israeli soldiers serving along the border with Lebanon.
- Boxing Day is an English tradition the day after Christmas. It got its name because it's the day on which families would literally "open the box" (the alms box) to the poor. Traditionally, every church in England had an alms box, into which people would place money intended for donation. On Boxing Day the contents were distributed to the less fortunate. The tradition continues today.
- Some Christmas songs never seem to get old. The top three most covered are:
  - Silent Night: Written in 1818, there are 26,496 versions
  - White Christmas: Written in 1940, there are 20,721 versions
  - Jingle Bells: Written in 1857, there are 19,080 versions
- In Spain, the New Year's tradition for good luck revolves around grapes. If you can stuff 12 grapes in your mouth at midnight you've achieved good luck for the next year.



## Coping With Holiday Stress (cont'd)

### 2) Keep Expectations in Check

It's okay to feel excited or wary regarding the holiday season. As has already been stated, December is often an extreme month for people, be it positive or negative. However, it's also helpful to realize that our expectations can be problematic if they get too exaggerated. On the positive side, if we expect our holiday experience to be unrealistically fun and joyous, we will probably be disappointed when confronted with reality. On the negative side, if we expect the holiday season to be utterly miserable, then this expectation itself could become a "self-fulfilling prophecy" that creates the very outcome we're dreading. As such, it can be a good idea to dial back our expectations a notch or two if they tend toward either extreme.

### 3) Focus On Goals and Resolutions (But Keep Them Realistic!)

Making New Year's resolutions is another strategy that can be helpful for navigating the holiday season by fostering an optimistic perspective toward the year ahead. The end of one year and the start of another can be an opportunity for taking stock of the direction our life is heading and setting goals for future aspirations. Such goals can be regarding health, relationships, business ventures or any other pursuit that feels meaningful. One cautionary note is that we need to be careful to keep our goals grounded in reality, otherwise our good intentions can back-fire and leave us mired in discouragement.

### 4) Give Yourself Permission to Feel the Way You Do

If it turns out that, despite your best efforts, you still find yourself struggling over the holidays, try to remember that it's okay to feel however you do. Commercial marketing and media messaging almost exclusively promotes the holiday season as a time of fun and happiness. But this is simply not everyone's experience. If you're one of the many people who isn't feeling the holiday joy this year, you may feel like there's something wrong with you. Believing ourselves to be "wrong" for struggling emotionally only makes it worse. Try to remember that your feelings are valid – whatever they are – and no one knows how you "should" feel better than you.

In conclusion, the month of December can be a positive or negative experience for people, but, one way or another, it tends to involve stress. Being prepared and having perspectives and strategies in place to cope with that stress can help us feel as healthy and strong as possible through the holiday season and heading into the New Year.

By Graham Walker

*Everyone at UIC would like to wish our member companies, their employees and families a very happy and safe holiday season!*

