

HOLIDAY MENTAL HEALTH

By Kathy Korell-Rach, Ph.D.

The holiday season can be a beautiful time of year that holds a certain sort of “magic” as we turn our attention towards gathering with others, celebrating, and exhibiting that classic “good will towards men.” However, it can also be extremely difficult for those with mental health concerns. Here are some tips for making your holidays more enjoyable:

1. **Make a list...and check it twice.** Holiday time is busy! So many things are added to our already packed schedules, such as shopping for that perfect gift, baking goodies for our neighbors, and finding the right outfit for that special holiday party. When we are overwhelmed, we begin forgetting things we usually remember. Make your life easier by writing down that shopping list, planning the most time-saving plan of attack (e.g., order of stores to go to, what projects to do in-between laundry loads, etc.), and jotting down daily reminders of what you need to do. Feel good every time you cross something off.
2. **Keep a routine.** A major contributing factor to mood disorder relapse is changes in routines, including changes in sleeping habits. No matter what you have to do, keep a consistent bedtime and wake up at the same time each day, even if it is the weekend. Keep naps to a minimum so you can fall asleep at night.
3. **Remember your loved ones.** Holidays are particularly painful times for those who have lost loved ones. You might be tempted to try to ignore your pain or avoid things that remind you of that person. Grief is a reflection of how much someone means to you, and tears are a way of honoring that person’s memory. Give yourself time and space to remember your loved one, which might include: giving a toast to the person at dinner, lighting a candle in memory, or looking at pictures either alone or with another person.
4. **Take care of yourself.** We tend to focus on others to the detriment of ourselves during the holidays. This results in feeling overwhelmed, fatigued, and sometimes resentful. To combat these effects, make sure that you carve out time for you! Incorporate small things daily (e.g., slowing down and enjoying that cup of coffee or tea, deep breathing for a few minutes, stretching, or choosing clothing that feels comfortable) as well as more time-consuming things (e.g., manicure/pedicure, bubble baths, projects you enjoy, going to a movie) on a regular basis. The list of potential self-care activities is limitless, so have fun.
5. **Focus on the “reason for the season.”** It is unlikely that you celebrate the holidays solely for commercialism. Whatever your religious or spiritual beliefs are about this time of year, make sure to put these considerations first in your priorities. Focusing on living in accordance with your values is so much more gratifying than buying that next present.