

### **By Mark Underwood**

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Many people find the holidays a delightful time of year. But for others, the holidays—that time between Thanksgiving and New Year’s—can be a lonely, stressful time of year.

Feelings of sadness, low energy and wistfulness can be hard to cope with, or feelings of loneliness may be present if some of your family members will be away and won’t make it home for the holidays this year.

If you are feeling empty or sad during the holidays while everyone around you seems to be having fun, you can make practical changes that allow you to feel less stressed and more relaxed.

Keep in mind that unrealistic perceptions and expectations are part of every holiday season. Some people feel so stressed and anxious at this time of year they want to be left alone. But you can work on having a new attitude of looking forward to joining in the festivities of the season.

### **Managing Daily Stress**

If you have battled anxiety, stress and low energy during the holidays, you are probably looking for a respite from a variety of stressors that can make life miserable.

Think of stress this way. Stress is crucial if you are in a crisis. Stress is a natural and important biological “fight or flight” response. The body is designed for short bursts of activity, but the ongoing nature of daily stress often means that the system is left ‘on’ to respond.

### **Seven Tips to Make Holidays More Meaningful**

Use these tips to make this holiday season the best it can be—a season of less stress and more meaning for you and your family.

1. Take care of yourself by eating right. People tend to skip meals, eat on the run, and eat more sugar during the holidays. Manage stress by managing your health.
2. Give yourself permission to feel a mix of emotions during the holidays. Most people feel an ebb and flow of emotions throughout the year but often more so during holidays because it is a season that evokes memories of the past.
3. It is okay to spend time taking care of yourself. When you do, you’ll be more apt to relax and enjoy the season. People have different levels of needs so pay attention to your own unique circumstances.
4. Give yourself permission to have more control in your life. You don’t have to say ‘yes’ to every holiday invitation or request.
5. Time management is very important for reducing stress. For example, let some of your children or grandchildren prepare holiday meals, bake cookies or help decorate the house.
6. Share responsibilities. Ask for help. Delegate holiday tasks so you’re not overstressed with deadlines.
7. Don’t have unrealistic expectations about what you can and can’t do during the holidays. Give yourself credit for what you can do and recognize you’re not super human. When you do, you’ll have a more enjoyable holiday season.