

TIPS FOR SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

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Finally! It's the holiday season! We get a break from work and school, visit family, watch football games, and eat great food. And the other time-honored tradition: we get stressed out.

Stress, anxiety, depression, and anger can all be caused by certain patterns of thinking. That pattern is usually some version of "things must or should go a certain way" or "other people must or should behave in certain ways". According to Dr. Jonathan Abramowitz, an expert in anxiety disorders and psychiatry at the University of North Carolina's School of Medicine, "it's the way we think about things that dictate our emotions". Luckily, we can learn to change the way we think in order to manage our emotions. Here are some ways we can control our thinking to keep stress to a minimum:

Identify what the trigger is—a relative's comment or the thought of a departed loved one—recognize how it makes you feel and slow down your thought process to keep your emotions from going 0-100 in 5 seconds flat.

Put expectations in perspective—lower them; the holidays do not have to be perfect.

Consider yourself first—we cannot control what others do or say but we can change the way we think about certain things.

Limit demands and ultimatums; replace "should", "must" and "have to" with "I wish", "maybe" and "my preference is...".

OTHER TIPS TO GET THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

- Remember you can always say "no".
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Take time for yourself. Although spending time with family and friends is great, it is also important to have at least 5 minutes to yourself to relax.
- Create new, more active traditions. Instead of throwing a dessert or cocktail party, try snowshoeing or ice-skating as an alternate holiday event.
- Don't overdo it with alcohol or caffeine. These stimulants will only cause you more grief in the end by adding to your feeling of stress.
- Laugh. Laughing is a great tension reliever.