

Avoiding Holiday Burnout

What to Know

For people who enter the holiday season stressed out from their busy and overscheduled lives, the holidays can feel overwhelming. Added demands might diminish your holiday spirit, leading to burnout. Signs of burnout include:

- reduced performance and productivity
- anxiety
- detachment
- feeling listless
- low mood
- difficulty concentrating
- lack of creativity
- fatigue
- excessive use of substances, including alcohol, drugs, or prescription medicine
- physical and mental overwhelm
- moodiness and irritability
- inability to make decisions
- low motivation.
- withdrawal from support systems
- hopelessness

Sufferers of “holiday burnout” are often stressed by the perceived additional demands and expectations associated with preparation for, and celebration of, the holidays. Some cases of holiday burnout are likely related to depression, which can peak during the holidays. Others report feeling burned out simply because they have taken on too many responsibilities. Overscheduling combined with the demands of entertaining, shopping, decorating, and other holiday traditions can lead to overwhelm in even the most organized person. In addition, interpersonal conflicts surface during the holidays because of individual differences in expectations and increased stress levels.

Here are some suggestions to avoid holiday burnout.

1. Prioritize. You may not be able to do everything you wish during the holidays, so identify what is most important to you. Let go of the rest. Spend 15-20 minutes making a list of what you would like to do, then pare it down to what is most meaningful. Know what you want to invest your time and effort into this holiday season, then say “no” to opportunities and invitations that do not line up with your priorities.

2. Pace yourself. Holiday sales might tempt you to shop, but be sure to pace yourself. The most stressful thing you can do is wait until the last minute to get all your shopping done. Try to shop early to avoid parking problems, waiting in long lines, and the overall rushed feeling that comes with last-minute shopping.

3. Shop online. If crowds stress you out, avoid them. Get on your electronic device in the comfort of your home to search for gifts. You can shop any time, day or night, and you will avoid the crowds, lines, and parking. Plus, with free shipping, it can sometimes cost less to shop online.

4. Avoid overcommitting yourself. Commit to attend some social events, instead of pushing yourself to attend all of them. Schedule time for yourself to relax by blocking out down time in your calendar or planner.

5. Delegate. Some high achievers do not delegate enough. They often do things better and faster than others, so they become chronic do-it-yourselfers. But doing this puts you at risk for burnout. For example, if you know a specific gift you want to get and you know a loved one will be near that store, ask them to pick it up for you. If you are hosting a holiday party, ask for help from family members. This gives you more time to prepare what you need to at home, without rushing around and dealing with crowds.

6. Be realistic. If you are a high achiever, you might also be a perfectionist. When you expect perfection during the holidays, you add unnecessary stress and fatigue. If you are hosting a party, why not make it a potluck? Try to keep things simple.

7. Get enough rest. You will not feel energized to complete all the tasks in front of you if you are tired. So, avoid sacrificing sleep. While you may have more on your to-do list than usual, rest should be at the top of the list. Sleep is restorative, and your body repairs itself from the damage of stress, physical strain, infection, and pollutants. Consider:

- maintaining a consistent sleep-wake schedule.
- exercising every day.
- avoiding naps close to bedtime.
- avoiding electronics, alcohol, and large meals before bedtime.
- sleeping in a dark, quiet, cool, and comfortable environment.

8. Give yourself permission. Allow yourself to feel what you feel and make the best choices for you. Do not judge or compare your feelings or choices with anyone else. You have the right to identify things that are important for you – and how you will make the holidays enjoyable and meaningful.

Burnout during the holiday season is common, but you do not have to suffer. You can avoid burnout by setting realistic expectations, starting early on holiday tasks, taking time to rest and recharge, and maintaining boundaries. If you give yourself time to rejuvenate, you will be ready to take on the challenges of the upcoming new year with renewed energy.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Are you already experiencing signs of burnout? Describe your symptoms.

Spend 15-20 minutes making a list of what you would like to do, then pare it down to what is most meaningful and important. Use a notebook if you require more space.

Who do you want to buy gifts for? Write down names, gift ideas, and deadlines to purchase the gifts.

Set aside time each day to do things you enjoy. When can you fit in downtime or pleasurable, relaxing activities? Be specific and add it to your calendar or planner.

Remember to delegate! Write down the names of loved ones and specific tasks they can do for you.

Do you have unrealistic expectations of the holiday season? Explain.

Do you get enough rest? Do you typically find yourself exhausted during the holidays because you are sacrificing your sleep? Why? Explain.

What can you do to ensure you get enough rest this holiday season?

What are some ways you can make the holidays enjoyable and meaningful for you? Be specific.

What else can you do to avoid burnout? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

How motivated are you to avoid burnout? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?
