

Managing your mental health during the holidays

The holiday season is meant to be a time of joy and excitement. However, it can often make people more vulnerable to stress, anxiety and depression due to the dizzying array of demands it brings.

As we continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, the holidays will surely present us with new challenges and stressors this year. The good news is there are things you can do to help reduce feelings of stress, worry and sadness:

- **Create a plan**

- Let go of the idea of the perfect holiday. Be realistic and pace yourself.
- Make a list and prioritize important activities to make them more manageable. Choose activities that fit your goals and emotional needs.
- Keep it affordable. Plan how you spend your time and resources. Most people prefer a thoughtful gift rather than one that's simply expensive.

- **Acknowledge your feelings**

- Be mindful of your mood so you can recognize unhealthy thinking and emotional patterns. This can help you accept yourself and your feelings with greater ease.
- Practice being present and grateful each day. Don't allow holiday pressures to cloud what's important. By focusing on what you have, rather than what you lack, your emotions can shift from stress and sadness to joy and vitality.

- **Reach out**

- Due to COVID-19, traditional holiday gatherings may be put on hold this year. However, you should still connect with family and friends, whether through the mail, over the phone or by video chat.
- Contact a friend or relative who may otherwise be alone.
- Make amends. The holidays may provide more opportunities to apologize for past disagreements with loved ones and patch up relationships.
- If you have frequent or overwhelming feelings of anxiety and/or depression, talk with your doctor.

- **Take care of your mind and body**

- Exercise. Physical activity keeps mood in check and releases endorphins that produce positive feelings.
- Get a good night's sleep. Try to go to bed at a certain time each night. Adequate sleep allows the body to reset and handle challenges each day.
- Find time to relax. Allow yourself time each day for relaxing activities like meditation, reflection, journaling or reading.
- Eat well. Be mindful of excess sweets, caffeine, alcohol or other substances that might negatively impact your physical health and/or mental well-being.