

Winter and Holiday Newsletter 2019-2020

National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG)
Risk Management Committee - Mental Health Subcommittee



Healthy Holiday Lifestyle

Stress and anxiety from the transition of the seasonal operational tempo combined with the arrival of the holiday season can be challenging. It may be an excellent time to try to reframe your thinking about the holidays.

For those who work all year, the meeting season is in full swing and will continue for the next several months. Many others are either in or headed to Australia to assist with fires and will miss the holidays. Others are using leave and will have a break for a few weeks. Regardless, it is essential to continue a healthy lifestyle, both mentally and physically.

If you dread the holidays and the likely stress ahead, consider viewing the holidays as an opportunity to enhance your psychological well-being. There are many helpful steps you can take to lessen holiday stress and feel more optimistic about the season.



Adapting to Social Norms and Expectations

Transitioning back to our family and society "norms" and expectations is often difficult once the fire season slows down and we reintegrate. As we take time away from work, we may be separated from our daily support base regardless of how much we enjoy time off.

Some may feel a sense of isolation, even though family and friends surround you. Many of them do not and will not understand where you have been and what you have experienced over the past few months. Be patient with yourself – and with them. Recognize this is a typical reintegration stressor.

The season often brings unwanted guests. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to your expectations. Try to set conversation boundaries, even if they are just yours. Before the gathering, identify your emotional triggers along with the people who tend to drain your energy. This can give you a better sense of direction once you walk into the room.

Slow down at the dinner table. Chances are Christmas Dinner is not a short meal break before getting back to a long shift. Take your time and enjoy a slower pace.

Be mindful of top-down authority. If guests are late for an engagement, even though you said "1800," it is probably not that big of a deal. Enjoy opportunities where you are not required to be the decision-maker. Let someone else do it.

What Causes the Holiday Blues?

The holiday blues are feelings of sadness, stress, irritability that tend to occur around the holiday season. The season can be a source of depression, irritability, anxiety, despair, and regrets. Changes in family dynamics, problems at work, personal losses, grief, health concerns, and other issues can cause overwhelming feelings of sadness. Something as simple as your [circadian rhythm](#) being thrown off by the dwindling sunlight might be the culprit.

Feeling blue and being depressed are not the same thing. Once the holidays are over and your normal routine resumes, seek help if you are still feeling depressed, especially if it has manifested into destructive behaviors.

You may be remembering those who were lost to a Line of Duty Death (LODD) this past year and perhaps feel a sense of guilt because you made it home for the holidays. You worry about the isolated co-worker who is injured, depressed, or drinks too much. You worked as much overtime as you could to buy the best gifts, only to learn your significant other resents that you were not present most of the year. Or maybe you are going to be alone for the holidays.

Take Time for Yourself

It is okay to take time for yourself without feeling guilty. Be mindful and focus on the present rather than dwell on the past or worry about the future.

Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything that is going on. Find something that clears your mind, slows your breathing, and restores your calm.

Sometimes self-care is the best thing you can do, and others will benefit when you're feeling less stressed.

Many people either choose to spend the holidays alone or end up that way as a matter of circumstance. A solitary celebration is an excellent opportunity to create the holiday of your dreams. Today things are very different, and spending time home alone or taking a trip over the holidays can be a rewarding experience. A holiday does not need to be shared with others to be celebrated. It simply needs to be enjoyed.

Regardless, don't be held hostage by the holidays. Make time to rest, recharge, and do something you enjoy.

- Reflect on aspects of your life that give you joy.
- Think about the things you have rather than what you don't have.
- Too much holiday "cheer" such as alcohol can increase your stress.
- Be realistic. As families change and grow, traditions often change as well. Try to be flexible.
- Stick to a budget.
- It is okay to say no and cut back on commitments.
- Stay with your regular exercise routine.
- Manage expectations. Not everything is always perfect.
- Stay connected. For people who live far away from family members or who've recently lost loved ones, the holidays can be a lonely time. Reach out.
- Know your "triggers" and healthy ways to work through them.
- Remember, you may enjoy the holidays this year more than you thought you could.

Seeking Assistance

If the tips above are not helpful and you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed, consult with a licensed mental health professional. They can help you identify problem areas and then develop an action plan for changing them.

Find nearby psychologists by visiting APA's [Psychologist Locator](#):

Or click on the following links:

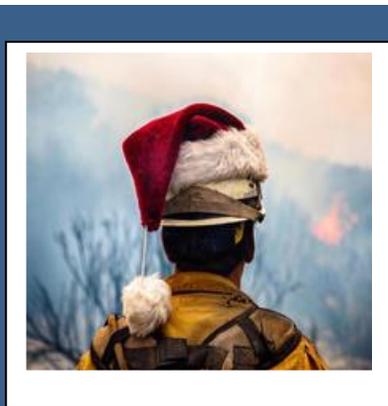
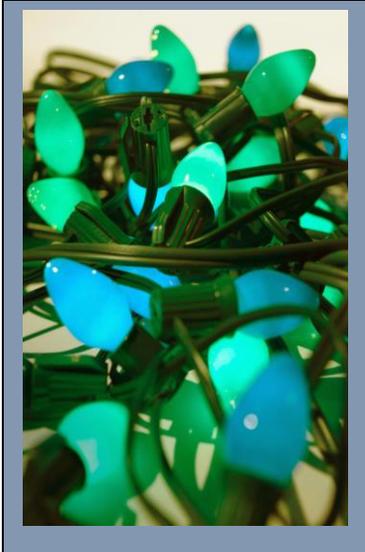
[Veterans Crisis Line](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

[Suicide Lifeline](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

[Depression CBT Self Help App](#)



Our greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.

