



Thriving During the Holidays: Making the Most of the Season

When we think about the holidays, so much comes to mind: traditions and good food, kids tearing through wrapping paper, tree lights and favorite movies, good times with good friends, and finding the perfect gift. But that's not all.

Sometimes the holidays conjure up stress: trying to please everyone, the crowds, the overstimulation, even family squabbles. The reality is the holidays typically turn out good, or not, depending on our perspective. There is a lot we can't change about the holidays, but we can try to make the most of them despite the anxiety they can sometimes cause.

Here are four ways to make the most of your holiday season:

Plan ahead

According to WebMD, the average American spends 42 hours on holiday activities. Take time to make a list of your holiday events and errands. Tie these items to a detailed calendar so you can spread out the shopping and work involved. You can always change the calendar later, but experts recommend you first make a plan.

Next, look at your calendar and list, and find ways to simplify it. Just because you've always decorated the house from top to bottom doesn't mean you have to do it each year. Maybe it's okay to bring a store-bought treat to a party so you can eliminate some of the baking you do. Go to an event for a shorter period of time so you can still visit, but not get overwhelmed.

Ask for help. As seniors get older, it can become increasingly stressful to fulfill the holiday obligations that once brought so much joy. Review favorite activities and see where you can ask for help. Inquire about delivery services in the area, and ways to shop online. Ask a child or grandchild to help wrap presents. It could become a new, favorite tradition. If cooking a holiday meal has become too much, ask to make it a potluck instead.

Additionally, if someone is going through the first holiday season since losing a loved one, it's even more important to plan ahead, eliminate unnecessary items and ask for help.

Find ways to save money

*First take a look at your finances and set a budget ahead of time. Ric Edelman, author of *Financial Security in Troubled Times*, says most people mistakenly make a list of people they must buy for *before* looking at their overall budget. Consumer Reports estimates that 49 million people get gifts they don't want each year, a statistic that might help place gift giving in a different light.

*Don't wait until the last minute to buy. When we're in a rush, it's easy to spend too much money. Along with planning your to-do list, plan so that your shopping is done well ahead of time.

*While you're holiday shopping, look for a few gifts you can buy for other times of the year, such as birthdays and weddings. If you plan your shopping, it's likely you can save on your yearly gift budget this way, too.

Find ways to bond with family long-distance

Many grandparents find themselves in a position of not being able to spend as much time with kids and grandkids as they'd like because they are simply too far away to travel. By getting a bit more creative, there are ways to feel closer during the holidays, especially with today's technology. Here are some ideas:

*Skype time together. This technology allows people to 'visit' via computer. It's a great way, as a grandparent, to read a bedtime story, share tree decorating and even open presents together.

*Revive old-fashioned letter writing. Even though technology is second nature to today's kids, most still love getting mail. Send them a holiday wish each week, and ask for a letter and a photo in return.

*Ask for homemade gifts. One way to bond with grandchildren is by sharing a memory of a special gift they made themselves.

*Volunteer to help with an event locally that serves underprivileged kids. It might make missing your own grandkids a bit easier.

Create new traditions

This might be especially important if someone is grieving over the loss of a spouse or lifelong friend this holiday season. Some holiday traditions might simply be too hard without the participation of the person who passed. Also, creating new traditions might help you or your loved one accept that life will now be different. Here are some ideas:

*Go out to eat for a holiday meal.

*Get involved in a charity.

*Learn a new holiday hobby, such as making your own wrapping paper with grandkids. You can learn more about creating new and unique holiday traditions at:

www.signupgenius.com

Finally, most experts agree the holidays are a time when we eat too much and exercise too little. Keep your current healthy routines as much as possible. You'll not only feel better, but you'll help fight illness.

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