

Holiday

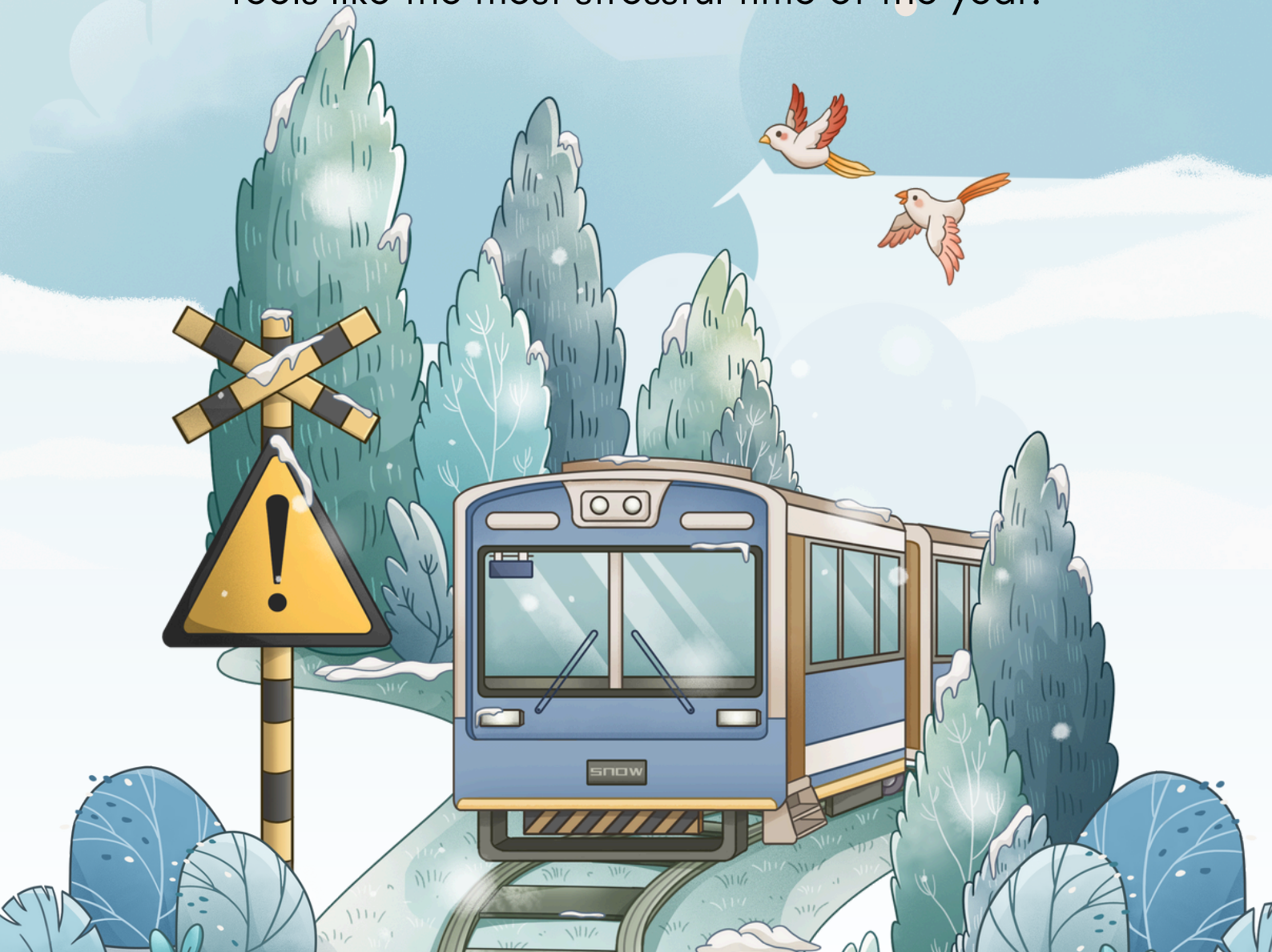
TEAM
KENTUCKY[®]

CABINET FOR HEALTH
AND FAMILY SERVICES

Survival Kit

for teens
& young adults

A resource guide for when “the most wonderful time of the year”
feels like the most stressful time of the year.



TEAM KENTUCKY

CABINET FOR HEALTH
AND FAMILY SERVICES

HOW TO USE



This resource kit includes tips for managing common holiday stressors. Taking time to reflect on the things you know may be difficult and develop a plan early can help to reduce stress and improve overall emotional wellness during the holidays.

QUESTIONS

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To access more mental health resources visit <https://dbhdid.ky.gov/mh/mhp>



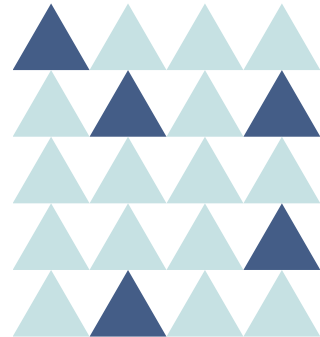


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If you are feeling overwhelmed or
having thoughts of suicide, reach out
for help right away.



COMMON HOLIDAY CHALLENGES



Pressure to force cheerfulness or be in the “holiday spirit

Reminders of grief and loss

Seasonal depression



Work stress related to deadlines and changes to workflow due to time off

Financial stress

Changes to normal routine

Over-scheduling and pressure to participate in many activities.

Changes in eating and exercise habits



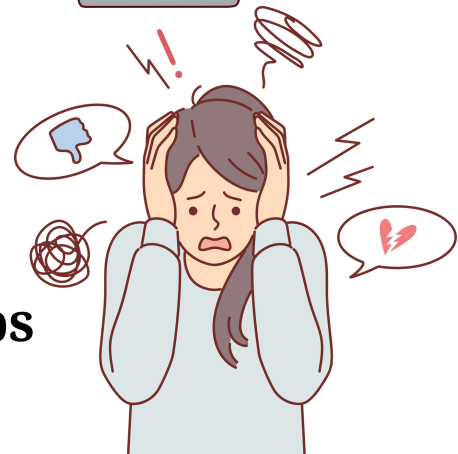
Travel stress

Sensory overload

Strained relationships with loved ones

Feelings of loneliness or isolation

Managing mental health symptoms and substance use recovery





RESPECTING YOUR FEELINGS

during the holidays

There is often pressure to be cheerful or in the “holiday spirit.” Here are strategies to help when you are just not feeling it:



Acknowledge Your Feelings: Allow yourself to feel whatever you’re feeling without judgement. It is okay to have moments of sadness, overwhelm, and anger. Acknowledging these emotions can help you process them.

Communicate Your Needs: It is okay to ask for what you need to feel safe and comfortable. Let your loved ones know how you are feeling and allow them to support you.



Real
★ ★ ★ NOT
PERFECT

Set Realistic Expectations: Remember that the holidays do not have to be perfect.

REMEMBER *it is an act of courage*

to feel your feelings when in the past you may have told yourself to “get over it” or that it did not matter.

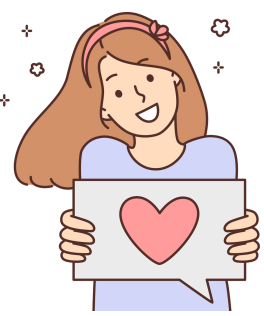


RESPECTING YOUR FEELINGS

during the holidays

There is often pressure to be cheerful or in the “holiday spirit.” Here are strategies to help when you are just not feeling it:



Be Kind to Yourself: Allow yourself to rest and engage in activities that you genuinely enjoy. Give yourself permission to say “no” when you need to rest.



Practice Mindfulness and Gratitude: Mindfulness techniques can help you stay present and grounded, alleviating feelings of pressure. Gratitude can help you find moments of joy amidst the stress.

Seek Professional Help: If feelings of pressure or sadness are overwhelming, consider talking to a therapist or counselor for additional coping strategies.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or having thoughts of suicide, reach out for help right away.

Call-Text-Chat 988



REMEMBER *it is an act of courage*

to feel your feelings when in the past you may have told yourself to “get over it” or that it did not matter.



SCHOOL-LIFE BALANCE

During the holidays

December can be challenging for school-life balance with looming deadlines and exams, alongside holiday commitments and travel plans. Emotional stress from the holiday season, financial pressures, and distractions can make it difficult to focus on school.



Prioritize Tasks: Make a list of remaining assignments, exams, and projects. Rank them by urgency and importance to focus your efforts.

Create a Study Schedule: Allocate specific times for studying and stick to it. Break down topics into manageable chunks to avoid cramming.

Limit Distractions: Find a quiet, comfortable study environment and use apps or tools to minimize distractions from your phone or social media.





SCHOOL-LIFE BALANCE

during the holidays



Stay Organized: Use planners or apps to track deadlines and appointments. Keeping everything in one place helps prevent last-minute chaos.

Schedule Time for Self-Care: Prioritize your well-being by including time for rest and activities you enjoy. Be sure to eat healthy meals, move your body, and get plenty of sleep.



Positive Vibes Only

Stay Positive: Keep a positive mindset. Celebrate small wins, and remind yourself that it's normal to feel stressed during finals.

Ask for Help: Don't hesitate to reach out to professors, classmates, or tutors if you're struggling with course material or feeling overwhelmed.



TIPS FOR AVOIDING OVER-SCHEDULING



during the holidays

It is easy to pack your schedule during the holidays due to a desire to connect with others, meet social obligations, and participate in festive activities. This can lead to feeling overwhelmed as you try to squeeze everything into your calendar.



Here are some tips to help you avoid over-scheduling and reduce stress during the holidays.



Prioritize Your Commitments: List the events and activities that are most important to you and focus on those. If you have a partner, consider making this list together and be willing to compromise.

Set Limits: Decide how many gatherings or commitments you can realistically handle and stick to that number. You might also consider setting limits for the amount of time spent at each event or activity.



TIPS FOR AVOIDING OVER-SCHEDULING

during the holidays



Use a Calendar: Keep track of all of your plans on a calendar. This will help you visualize your schedule and prevent over-booking.

Communicate: Let friends and family know your availability and boundaries to help manage expectations. Be honest about your ability to attend certain events and activities.

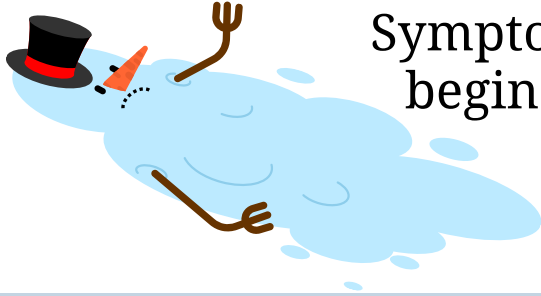


Plan Downtime: Every moment of the holiday season does not have to be filled with an activity or event. Be sure to block off some time for you to rest and recharge.

Be Flexible: Allow for adjustments in your plans but also be prepared to say no when necessary.

seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

WINTER BLUES



Symptoms of winter depression (fall-onset SAD) begin in the late fall or early winter months.

Symptoms begin to ease in mid-spring and summer months.

About 5% of adults experience seasonal depression, with symptoms typically lasting about 40% of the year.

Common symptoms of winter depression:

- Increased sleep and daytime drowsiness
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities formerly enjoyed
- Social withdrawal and increased sensitivity to rejection
- Grouchiness and anxiety
- Feelings of guilt and hopelessness
- Excessive tiredness (fatigue)
- Decreased sex drive
- Decreased ability to focus
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Increased appetite, especially for sweets and carbohydrates
- Weight gain
- Physical problems, such as headaches

What causes winter depression?

Seasonal depression is linked to changes in weather, light exposure, and social and environmental influences.

In the winter months, we often experience:

- **Shorter days** which can result in oversleeping
- **Less light** which can impact the sleep cycle
- **Temperatures and weather** that reduce social and recreational activities
- **Holiday-related stress**, including
 - Changes in routines due to school breaks
 - Changes to workflow due to staff time off
 - Increased financial pressures
 - Over-scheduling



seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

WHAT CAN I DO TO EASE MY SYMPTOMS?

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, it is always a good idea to talk to your doctor or a mental health provider.

Treatment options for seasonal depression might include talk therapy, medication, and light therapy.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or having thoughts of suicide, reach out for help right away.



Call-Text-Chat 988

Visit Psychology Today

to learn more about mental health treatment or to find a provider near you.

Here are some other things you can try to improve your seasonal symptoms:

- Try to spend time outside or near windows
- Connect with others
If you can't get together in person, use technology to stay in touch
- Find enjoyable indoor hobbies or activities or temperature-safe outdoor activities



- Get the right amount of sleep
- Reduce consumption of caffeine and alcohol as these can worsen sleep and anxiety problems

Eat healthy meals Exercise regularly Stay Hydrated



EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

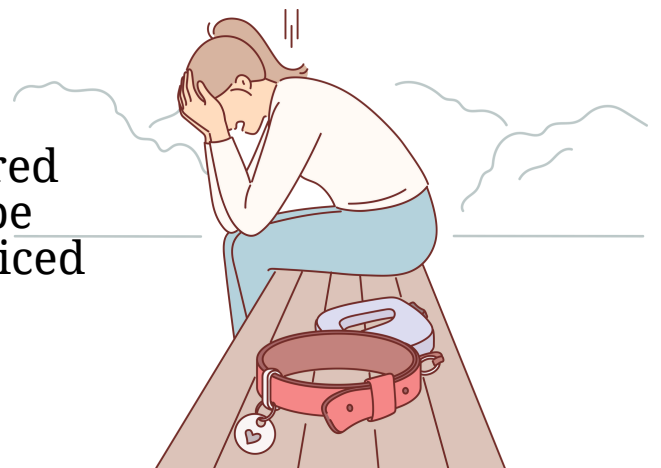
During the holidays

Feelings of grief and loss can be especially pronounced during the holidays. Any situation that results in changes to traditions, can evoke feelings of loss, grief, and sadness. Examples include:



Loss of a Loved One: The absence of family or friends who have passed away can feel particularly intense during holiday gatherings or traditions.

Loss of a Pet: Pets are often considered family members and their loss may be deeply felt when their absence is noticed in familiar holiday routines.



Relocation: Moving away or being unable to return home for the holidays can result in feelings of loss and isolation.



EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

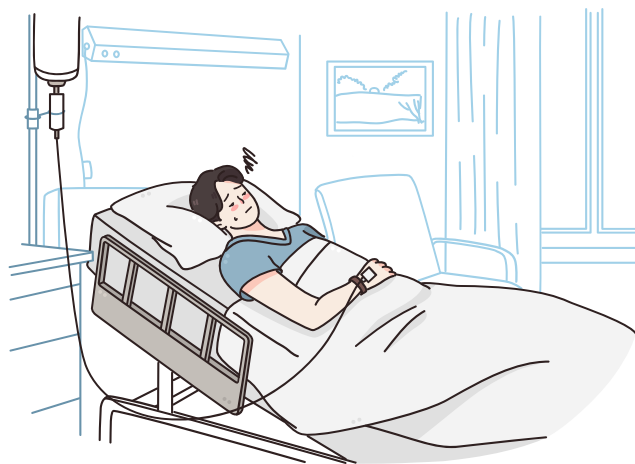
During the holidays



Separation or Divorce: Changes in family dynamics can cause feelings of loss related to familiar holiday routines or traditions.

End of Relationship: Breakups or estrangement from friends or family can lead to feelings of loneliness and grief, especially during time typically associated with togetherness.

Health Issues: Your own health issues or those of your loved ones can lead to an inability to fully participate in familiar traditions.



Financial Strain: Financial difficulties that prevent individuals from celebrating the way they wish or are used to can result in feelings of sadness or loss.

COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

During the holidays

Managing grief can be particularly difficult during the holidays. Here are some strategies that may help:



Acknowledge Your Feelings: It is okay to feel a range of emotions, including sadness, anger, and joy.

Set Realistic Expectations: The holidays may not feel the same as they once did. Give yourself space to adjust to the changes.



Create New Traditions: Starting new traditions can be a great way to honor your old traditions helping you to rediscover and experience joy.



Use Remembrance Rituals: Light a candle, create a memory ornament, or share stories about your loved one. These rituals can help keep their memory alive.



COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

During the holidays



Seek Support: Connect with friends, family, or support groups who understand what you are going through.

Prioritize Self-Care: This includes eating well, getting enough rest, and engaging in activities that bring you comfort.

Limit Social Obligations: It's okay to say no to events that feel overwhelming. Choose activities that you feel up to and that align with your emotional needs.



Seek Professional Help: If your grief feels unmanageable, consider talking to a therapist who specializes in grief counseling.



If you are feeling overwhelmed or having thoughts of suicide, reach out for help right away.



REMEMBER

it is an act of courage to hold your grief in one hand and your joy in the other.



10 TIPS FOR MINDFUL EATING

during the holidays

- 1 SLOW DOWN:** Taking the time to savor each bite can help you feel more satisfied while eating.
- 2 LISTEN TO YOUR BODY:** Pay attention to your hunger and fullness cues. Eat when you're hungry and stop when you feel satisfied, not uncomfortably full.
- 3 PRACTICE GRATITUDE:** Take a moment to appreciate the food in front of you and the effort that went into preparing it.
- 4 PORTION CONTROL:** Try using a smaller plate or bowl to help manage portion sizes. This can help prevent overeating without feeling deprived.
- 5 CHOOSE WISELY:** You don't have to sample everything available. Prioritize foods that you genuinely love and that feel special. Let the rest go.
- 6 ENGAGE YOUR SENSES:** Notice the colors, textures, and smells of your food to enhance the eating experience.
- 7 STAY HYDRATED:** Sometimes our bodies confuse thirst for hunger. Drinking water before and during meals can help you feel satisfied.
- 8 LIMIT MINDLESS SNACKING:** It is easy to lose track of how much you are eating if you are distracted. Try serving yourself a portion and then stepping away from the food table to enjoy conversations or activities.
- 9 ENJOY THE COMPANY:** Remember that the most important part of the holiday is the time spent with loved ones.
- 10 PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION:** Do not be too hard on yourself. The holidays are about enjoyment and one meal does not define your health journey.



THE CHALLENGES OF EATING WELL

During the holidays



CHALLENGE: Holiday meals often feature calorie-dense foods that are high in sugar, fat, and sodium.

STRATEGY: Balance these rich foods with lighter options like salads or roasted veggies.

CHALLENGE: Social gatherings can create pressure to overeat.

STRATEGY: Politely decline when you are full or simply do not want to try a particular dish. Try to shift the focus to enjoying the company rather than the food.



CHALLENGE: Stress, nostalgia, or family dynamics around the holidays can sometimes lead to emotional eating.

STRATEGY: Identify the causes of this type of response in yourself and think of some alternative coping skills to employ such as talking to a trusted friend or taking a walk.

CHALLENGE: Travel and holiday events can disrupt your normal routine, resulting in changes to eating and exercise routines as well as lack of time for meal planning and prep.

STRATEGY: Try to maintain a balanced routine as much as possible. Plan healthy snacks for travel. Identify quick and easy exercises that can be done anywhere.





THE CHALLENGES OF EATING WELL

During the holidays



CHALLENGE: All-or-nothing mindsets can lead to frustration and anxiety.

STRATEGY: Strive for balance, not perfection. If you have overindulged do not dwell on it or punish yourself by restricting food later. Instead, focus on maintaining a more regular eating pattern from that moment forward. Overindulging during the holidays does not define your overall health.

CHALLENGE: Eating while socializing can result in losing track of how much you've eaten.

STRATEGY: Try serving yourself a portion then step away from the food table to enjoy conversations or activities.



CHALLENGE: Family recipes and traditions are sometimes centered around indulgent foods and desserts.

STRATEGY: Offer to bring a healthy dish to share or adapt family recipes to include healthier ingredients. You can also choose a few treats you really enjoy and savor small portions, rather than sampling everything available.



MANAGING DIFFICULT FEELINGS ABOUT FOOD

during the holidays



If you are stressed or anxious about attending events centered around food, try some of these strategies to relieve your distress:

Plan Ahead: Familiarize yourself with the menu.

Consider discussing your needs with the host if you feel comfortable doing so.

You can also prepare a dish to share to ensure you have something you feel comfortable eating.



Set Boundaries: Communicate your needs regarding food and support. It is okay to ask for what you need to feel comfortable.

Practice Saying “No:” Prepare to decline food and drinks you do not want to eat or drink. It is perfectly acceptable to say “no.”

Focus on Connection:

Shift the focus away from food by connecting with others through conversation, games, or other activities.



Identify a Support System:

Bring a friend or identify someone attending who understands your journey and can offer support during the gathering.



MANAGING DIFFICULT FEELINGS ABOUT FOOD

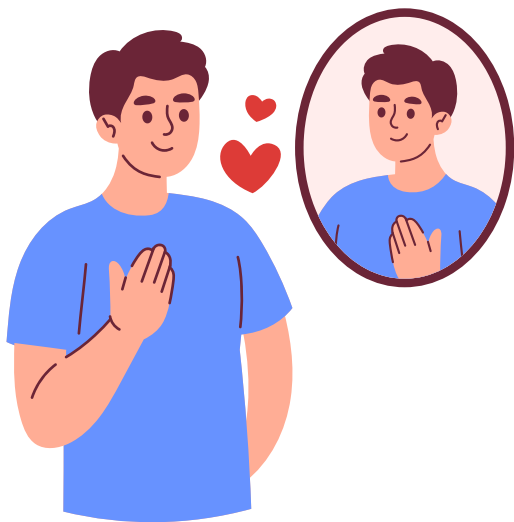
during the holidays



If you are stressed or anxious about attending events centered around food, try some of these strategies to relieve your distress:

Prepare for Challenges: Be aware of things such as certain foods, situations, comments, or individuals that may stir up strong emotions.

Identify strategies you can use when you feel overwhelmed, such as stepping outside for fresh air or practicing deep breathing.



Practice Self-Care and Compassion: Approach yourself with understanding and patience.

Remember that it is okay to have mixed feelings about the holidays.

Remember that it is okay to enjoy food and that what you eat during this time does not define your worth or health.

Seek Professional Support: Talking to a therapist can help you feel prepared before the event and to process any lingering feelings after the event.



MAINTAINING YOUR RECOVERY

During the holidays



The holidays can present several challenges for those in recovery from alcohol and other drugs. Here are some common ones:

Social Pressure: Family and friends may encourage drinking or drug use, or they may not understand the importance of your recovery and the work that goes into maintaining it, which can leave you feeling isolated or stressed.



Environmental Cues: This may include the presence of alcohol or drugs, but it also extends to people, places, things, or situations that remind you of using drugs or alcohol. These reminders can result in cravings and discomfort.



Emotional Stress: Large gatherings of family and friends can bring up unresolved issues, resulting in difficult or strong emotions.

Feelings of Loneliness: You may feel alone in your recovery journey, or you may even choose not to attend certain celebrations to protect your recovery, which can lead to feelings of isolation.

Disrupted Routine: Holidays often disrupt your regular routine, which may include recovery meetings or self-care practices that are important for maintaining your recovery.



MAINTAINING YOUR RECOVERY

During the holidays

The holidays can present several challenges for those in recovery from alcohol and other drugs. Here are some strategies to help:



Plan Ahead: Talk to the host about what will be available at the event.

You might consider bringing your own alcohol-free drink to enjoy and share.

Check out these **alcohol-free** holiday drink ideas!



Set Boundaries: Communicate your needs regarding your recovery and support. It is okay to ask for what you need to feel comfortable.

Practice Saying “No:” Prepare to decline anything you do not feel comfortable engaging in, including drinks, food, and certain activities. It is perfectly acceptable to say “no.”

Focus on Connection: Shift the focus away from your recovery by engaging with others through conversation, games, or other activities.



Identify a Support System: Bring a friend or identify someone attending who understands your journey and can offer support during the gathering.



SENSORY OVERLOAD

During the holidays

SENSORY OVERLOAD occurs when one or more of the senses become overwhelmed by sensory experiences.

Sensory overload can result in...

- Physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, or nausea.
- Emotional responses such as feelings of anxiety, irritability, or distress.
- Difficulty focusing or becoming easily distracted.
- Avoidance or withdrawal from social situations or certain environments.
- Heightened sensitivity that can cause certain sounds, lights, or smells to feel more intense or bothersome than usual.

The holidays can contribute to sensory overload for several reasons:



- Crowded environments such as holiday gatherings or large crowds at malls and grocery stores
- Loud noises including increased volume from music, conversations, and festivities, especially in enclosed spaces

- Holiday decorations that include flashing lights or bright displays
- Strong smells from cooking, holiday candles, or perfumes
- Juggling multiple tasks at once during the busy season
- Visual clutter including the combination of decorations, gift wrapping, and displays





COPING WITH SENSORY OVERLOAD



During the holidays

Managing sensory overload during the holidays can be crucial for maintaining well-being. Here are some strategies to help:

Identify Stimuli and Reactions: Whether it is bright lights, certain sounds, large crowds, or specific scents, recognizing the specific factors that cause you to feel overstimulated can help you to plan accordingly.

Plan Ahead: If you know that certain situations will be challenging, plan strategies in advance. This may include timing your activities to minimize exposure or limiting the length of time you stay at a particular event or gathering

Create a Safe Space: Designate a quiet area where you can retreat if things become overwhelming. This may be a room in your home, a quiet corner at an event, or even stepping outside.

Communicate Your Needs: Let friends and family know about your sensory sensitivities. It is okay to ask for what you need to feel comfortable.

Use Noise-Canceling Headphones: These can help to block out loud noises while also allowing you to listen to music or sounds that you find soothing.

Practice Grounding Techniques: Grounding techniques help you to stay present and reduce feelings of overwhelm. This may include breathing exercises, focusing on your senses, or fidget tools.

Set Realistic Expectations: Understand that it is okay not to participate in every event. Focus on what feels manageable and enjoyable to you.



LONELINESS

During the holidays

There are many reasons that you may feel lonely or isolated during the holidays. Here are some strategies to help:

Reach Out: Connect with friends or family, even if it's just a text or a phone call. Sharing your feelings can help alleviate loneliness.



Join Community Activities: Look for local events, volunteer opportunities, or community gatherings. These activities can help you feel more connected.

Practice Self-Compassion: Acknowledge your feelings of loneliness without judgment. It's okay to feel this way, and being kind to yourself can help ease those feelings.





LONELINESS

During the holidays



Limit Social Media: Sometimes social media can make feelings of loneliness or exclusion worse. Consider taking a break or limiting your time on these platforms.

Plan Activities: Keep yourself busy with activities you enjoy. This may include reading, crafting, watching your favorite movies at home or going to a theater. Having something to look forward to can help.



Create New Traditions: Create new traditions that focus on self-care or personal interests. Some ideas include cooking a special meal or engaging in a favorite hobby.



Focus on Gratitude: Reflecting on the positive aspects of your life, even small ones, can help shift your perspective and reduce feelings of loneliness.

Seek Professional Support: If feelings of loneliness persist, consider reaching out to a therapist or counselor who can provide support and coping strategies.

MANAGING TRAVEL STRESS

during the holidays



Traveling during the holidays is extra stressful due to increased crowds, higher costs, and tighter schedules, which can lead to long delays and logistical challenges. Additionally, heightened emotions and potential family conflicts can add to the pressure, making the experience more overwhelming.

Here are some tips to help make your holiday travels less stressful:



Plan Ahead: Make travel arrangements well in advance to avoid last-minute stress. Check travel times, book accommodations, and prepare your itinerary.

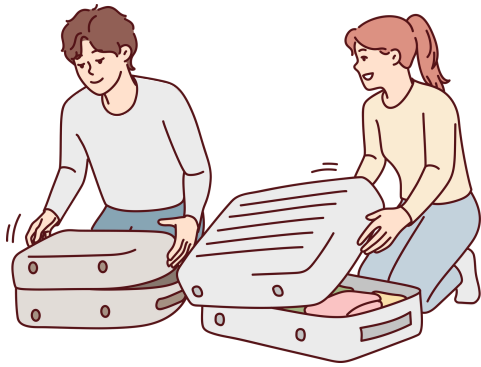
Stay Organized: Keep travel documents, tickets, and itineraries in a designated folder or app. Having everything in one place can minimize stress.



Communicate with Others: If traveling with others or planning to visit friends or family, communicate openly about expectations and plans to ensure everyone is on the same page.

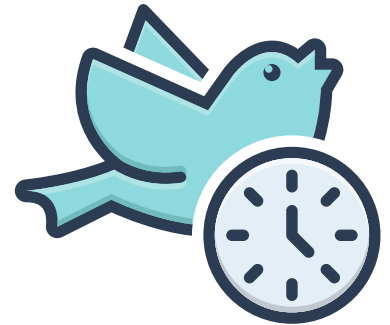
MANAGING TRAVEL STRESS

during the holidays



Pack Smart: Create a packing list to avoid forgetting essential items. Pack early to avoid last-minute stress.

Arrive Early: Give yourself extra time when going to the airport or other transportation center. This can help reduce anxiety and allow for unexpected delays.



Practice Self-Care: Make sure you are staying hydrated, eating healthy, and getting enough rest. Practice deep breathing or mindfulness to help calm your nerves while traveling. It might also be helpful to prepare distractions such as books, podcasts or music to help keep yourself relaxed during travel.

Be Flexible: Understand that travel plans change and be prepared for unexpected delays.

Stay Positive: Remind yourself of the reasons for your travel, whether it's to visit loved ones or enjoy a holiday experience.

SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

YES N
O

Am I making enough time for myself? YES NO

Have I been getting enough rest? YES NO

Am I getting enough exercise? YES NO

Have I been engaging in a mindfulness, spiritual, or religious practice?
Am I eating well? YES NO

Am I spending my money wisely and sticking to my budget? YES NO

Am I able to say “no” when I want or need to? YES NO

Am I present with my loved ones? YES NO

Am I maintaining a reasonable work-life balance? YES NO

Am I making space to appropriately express my emotions, including sadness, anger, and /or grief? YES NO

If you answered “no” to any of the questions, take some time to consider how to address that item:

TEAM KENTUCKY®

CABINET FOR HEALTH
AND FAMILY SERVICES

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