

# Tips for Dealing with Stress this Holiday Season!



The holidays are meant to be a time of joy and cheer—but amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, kicking off this year’s festive season will look different for many of us, and that may include a higher-than-usual level of stress.

The holidays are a stressful time for everyone, but they can be especially challenging for busy clinicians. Especially in this unusual year, uncertainty, worry, family holiday expectations, coupled with cold and flu season mean you and your staff are at even greater risk for illness and burnout.

To help you survive this hectic time of year, and ensure you’re bringing the best version of yourself to work for your patients, consider these holiday stress-reducing tips for physicians:

## 1. Get Plenty of Rest

As a healthcare professional, you know that the human immune system is especially compromised during the winter months. Colder temperatures, more time indoors and too much holiday celebrating can weaken our immunity and make us more susceptible to disease. Add a heavy dose of stress, and you’re perfectly primed to catch whatever is going around. With so much on your plate, contracting a cold or flu is the last thing you need.

That’s why it’s essential you get plenty of sleep. When you don’t get enough, it can reduce the number of infection-fighting antibodies in your body, [according to the Mayo Clinic](#). A full night’s rest will not only help strengthen your immune system, but it will also give you the mental fortitude to handle stressors throughout your workday. (After all, when you’re already exhausted, small frustrations feel much more significant.)

If you find it challenging to wind down before bed, consider developing a routine. Put your phone away at least an hour before your bedtime to avoid its distractions and blue light, and opt to read a book for entertainment instead. Also, be sure to stop consuming caffeine and other stimulants at least six hours before you want to sleep.

## 2. Pay Attention to Your Diet

If you're not used to eating lots of heavy, rich foods and sugary desserts, holiday treats can wreak havoc on your system. While enjoyable, consuming lots of fatty meals and processed snacks can weigh you down while offering little nutritional value.

Of course, you don't want to skip your favorite holiday dishes entirely. But do your best not to overeat, and intersperse your indulgences with plenty of nutrient-dense whole foods — like leafy greens, legumes and fresh fruit. This way, you'll have plenty of fuel to get through long days without falling prey to food-induced fatigue.

## 3. Take Breaks

While everyone else is kicking back and enjoying a little time off, healthcare professionals everywhere are in overdrive. But just because it's a busy time of year doesn't mean you can't take breaks. In fact, opting not to take time away is a surefire recipe for burnout.

In addition to stepping away for a few minutes throughout the day, be sure to schedule time with loved ones. While you may not be able to participate in every holiday activity, choose a few non-negotiables. Missing out on important memory-making can make people feel resentful and only serves to exacerbate stress.

Also, if you begin to notice symptoms of stress at work, such as tense muscles, irritability, anxiety, headaches and shortness of breath, then it's time for a break. Even just five minutes of deep, controlled breathing can help reduce stress symptoms and improve your mood.

## 4. Prepare Mentally for the Patient Influx

No matter the specialization or department, it seems every healthcare facility is especially busy during the winter months. Instead of feeling caught off-guard, take time to recognize the upcoming rush, and remember much of this is out of your control.

To prepare, schedule a staff meeting. Take time to discuss previous years' experiences and what everyone can do to improve efficiency and reduce friction in the weeks ahead. Make sure everyone on your team is prioritizing breaks and self-care, or you may find yourself short-staffed on your busiest days.

## 5. Remember Patients are Facing Holiday Stress, Too

It's easy to feel like you're the busiest person on earth, but remember, many of your patients are dealing with seasonal stress as well. Nearly everyone has a full plate this time of year and we're all affected by the worry and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than ever, is the time to focus on patient comfort and patient-centered care. Communicate fully with your patients and their loved ones, be respectful of their needs and values, and always include them in any conversations about their care plan.

While you may feel pressured to rush through time with patients when you're facing an overfilled schedule, never compromise on patient comfort. Take every necessary step to ease patients' anxiety and ensure a comfortable experience. For example, just because a flu shot may seem a simple procedure for you doesn't mean you should skip using an instant topical anesthetic.

There's no way around it: the holiday season is full of stressful experiences and unexpected mishaps. However, by using these five holiday stress-reducing tips for physicians, you can help prioritize your mental health while still consistently delivering the high-quality care your patients expect.

