

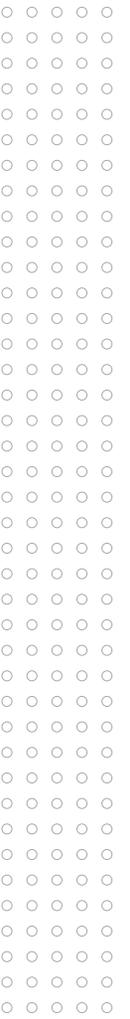


COVID Holiday Got You Down? *Bah Humbug!*

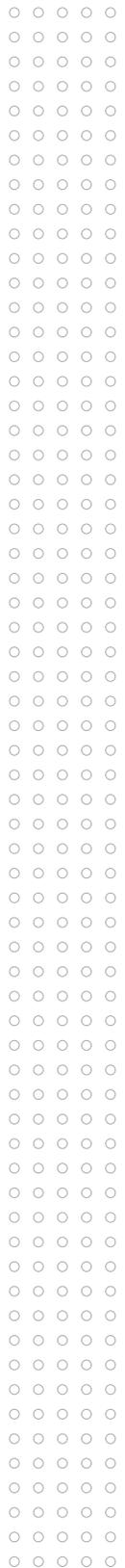
15 Tips for a Mental-Health-Friendly Holiday

For most, holidays ignite feelings that are happy, merry and bright. Our first holiday season with COVID in the picture may instead leave many feeling sad, fatigued and lonely. Here are 15 tips to help you reframe your mindset, and your approach, for a healthy, happy holiday:

- 1. Acknowledge your feelings and be realistic.** It's natural to want to compare this holiday season with those prior. It's such a deeply seeded part of our culture. But try not to compare today with the "good ole days", as you will likely set yourself up for disappointment. This year will likely look and feel very different. For example, find the silver-lining — celebrate the people in your life, the roof over your head, and your health and wellbeing.
- 2. Don't put all your focus or energy into just one day.** Do you find yourself longing for that traditional buffet full of holiday favorites with the extended family? Reframe your thinking around the joys of the season. Instead of awaiting "that one big day", find a little joy in something every day during the holiday season, like a cup of coffee in your special holiday mug, your favorite holiday play list, or attending a virtual church or spiritual service.
- 3. Get dressed.** Does working from home mean you're in sweats or yoga clothes 24/7? Sometimes dressing sloppy for days on end can make us feel sloppy and disengaged. A great trick to feel better, is to stay "put together." Now's the time to break bad cycles of not caring about how you look.
- 4. Start a NEW healthy habit.** Though many have adopted new healthy habits during COVID, others are struggling due to exhaustion or lack of motivation. You don't have to change everything in one day! Commit to one change each week in November and December and make those little changes stick. In a WebMD article, [What a 5% Weight Loss Can Do for Your Health](#), we are reminded that we can lower blood pressure by about 5 points if we trim just 5% from our total weight. Easy ideas include reducing soda intake, moving for 15 minutes more each day, adding 1 extra green vegetable to your daily diet, try time advantaged eating (i.e., intermittent fasting) or eliminating eating after your last meal of the day.
- 5. Attitude of gratitude.** Set aside differences and make time for reflection and gratitude. We can all find something to be thankful for, or someone to appreciate. Go out of your way to find ways to align, rather than divide, to elevate, rather than bring down. And remember the most important things in life don't come in gift wrap or get handed to you by a delivery driver. Give thanks generously!
- 6. Spend wisely.** According to a survey by Credit Karma, more than half (52 percent) of U.S adults say they've made impulse buys to cope with feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. The holidays may be an especially triggering time if prone to impulse spending. One of the best ways to avoid holiday financial stress is to reel back your budget, then stick to it. Try not to "stress spend." Instead, get creative with respect to what gifting looks like this year. Think about homemade gifts you can create on a budget or make together with family or friends. Resurrect the hand-written holiday card. Let yourself off the hook for buying as many gifts as you typically would or spending as much you have in years past. Overspending can lead to stress and depression when bills arrive after the holidays are over.



- 7. Divvy up your task list.** Don't feel you need to do all the shopping and take care of everything on your own. It can be too much pressure to put on yourself with your plate already full this year. People are happy to help if asked. Divvy up your list of things to do, or trade tasks with a friend to consolidate shopping, errands or pick-ups.
- 8. Learn to say no.** It can be difficult to say no. After all, many of us are people pleasers and helpers. We feel guilty if we don't help someone we love. We may even fear rejection. But learning to say no is a healthy way to establish boundaries if you are continuously feeling overextended. Even more importantly, saying no to one thing can create the possibility for us to say YES to what we personally prioritize as the important things we need for ourselves this season.
- 9. Rewrite the rules.** Make some new traditions with friends or family this year. Wherever you are, whatever your situation, find ways to start something fresh. Some ideas include reading one of your favorite holiday stories aloud. You can even do this for a loved one or friend over the phone or virtually. Make special, home-made ornaments. Play a game to see who remembers the most lyrics from your favorite holiday song. Have a virtual holiday sing-along or slumber party with matching pajamas and your favorite hot chocolate or cocktail recipe sent out to everyone in advance.
- 10. Take a break from work.** Forty-eight percent (48%) of Americans canceled summer travel due to Coronavirus concerns, according to a Valuepenguin.com survey this year. Time off can be used in many ways that don't involve travel. Taking a break from work is proven to reduce stress and decrease the likelihood of burnout. If you have vacation days, use them! Pledge to truly shut down, focus on what's important to you, and take needed time for mental, emotional, and physical rejuvenation.
- 11. Help thy neighbor.** The Mayo Clinic reports that volunteering decreases the risk of depression, provides purpose, and may even help you live longer! You don't have to serve at a food bank to give back this year! Interact in a way that you feel physically most comfortable. This could mean making phone calls for a local charity, sending home-made cards to our military, or helping stuff gift bags at your own home, where you feel safe from close personal interaction.
- 12. Check in on your circle.** Keep a pulse on vulnerable friends and neighbors. Don't assume everyone is okay. A quick call or wave, a conversation from the sidewalk. Ask questions. Make sure people you can impact feel your positivity and care this season.
- 13. Arm wrestle your cell phone.** Who's in control? You or your phone? If you think being on your phone constantly means you are "connected", then the reality is you are probably "distracted." Take the [Holiday Mindfulness Pledge](#), promoted by John M. Grohol, Psy.D., writer for PsychCentral.com. "I will not reach for my phone at a holiday gathering with my friends or family to distract me (even from something momentarily uncomfortable with those around me)."
- 14. Get some sunlight.** Millions of Americans are affected by seasonal affective disorder (SAD) each year. Sunlight can help stimulate the production of feel-good serotonin that helps relieve SAD. According to Dr. Judith Orloff, MD, with the University of California, you should spend time outdoors or near a window if going outside isn't possible. Ask your doctor about phototherapy, a treatment using a box that emits full-spectrum light.
- 15. Ask for help.** Know when you can't do it alone. According to Lisa Ferentz, LCSW-C, in her article titled [Why Asking for Help is Hard to Do in Psychology Today](#), "Asking for help means you care enough about yourself to increase the likelihood that things will work out in your favor by getting the support you deserve." Reach out to a trusted friend, a family member, your company's Employee Assistance Program, or local mental health provider.



If you feel things are beyond your control, you can always contact the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#). Their HelpLine can be reached Monday through Friday, 10 am-6 pm, EST. [1-800-950-NAMI \(6264\)](tel:1-800-950-NAMI) or info@nami.org