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Handling Holiday Stress: Ten Tips For Singles

By Toni Coleman

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Here we go again. Presents to buy, work to finish up, cards to write, plans to make, events and parties to attend: and all those things we "must do" because we've always done them.

Does this sound familiar? Do you go to sleep at night with the feeling that you are hopelessly behind schedule, yet have made good use (overuse) of your time? Do you experience even a small measure of dread as you approach this season, and a large measure of relief when it's all over? Most importantly, are you savoring any of the lovely sights, sounds, smells and feelings that are unique to this time of year; or are you just too tired and rushed to even notice? If this describes you, you are probably suffering from holiday stress. Compounding this is the widely held belief that this is just the way it has to be, and that your task is to just get through it.

The following tips are designed to give you a new perspective on this all too common problem. Read on, and see if you can make some small behavior changes/additions that could result in a lot less stress and a lot more enjoyment in the weeks ahead.

1.If you have a fairly sizeable family/extended family to shop for, your level of monetary, time and emotional stress can be very high. Therefore, consider approaching your family about your present tradition of gift exchanging. Growing in popularity is the system of drawing one name (of one family member) to buy a nice gift for. Everyone in the family receives one gift that another member had the time (and budget) to choose well. If your family is resistant, you could opt for two gifts per person, or some other compromise.

2.Try a new tradition of having a shopping day with friends (or family). Draw up your list, head for a nice mall or town center with great little shops (even better) and make it a day of shopping, lunch and lattes. You could finish with a late afternoon movie!

3.Consider on-line shopping. This is a great way to save time and get free gift-wrapping without the lines and headaches. It also allows more time for you to choose just the right gift for each person. You can have them mailed to you or sent to whatever address they will eventually be going to.

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4.If you send cards, consider after Christmas cards or New Year's cards. Why rush to send them before Christmas? The folks who receive them will have more time to focus on your news after Christmas, and may even find it more fun to receive something in the mail during the quiet "let down" period that follows each holiday.

5.Try to plan a few extra days off right before or during the December–January holidays. Even one extra day could be useful to pack, get an early start on travel, finish up last minute chores or errands, or catch up on sleep and R&R. We often mistakenly assume we will feel more rushed and behind if we take down time– the reverse is actually what occurs.

6.Do an inventory of your must–do. After you make your list, go through each one and ask yourself if this activity really gives you pleasure or serves your needs or the needs of a loved one. Cross off any that don't answer yes to the above question. Make sure you are not doing things out of rote because that's the way it has always been. If you have one or two you are unsure of, put them at the end of your list of priorities. This way, you can get to them if you have time after you have done the things you know will be of value to you.

7.Consider having a cleaning service come in at least once during the next month. Imagine the extra time (and lowered stress) you would have if someone else cleaned your bathroom and kitchen, washed your floors, dusted your furniture, etc. What a nice gift to give yourself!

8.Arrange to have a massage, facial, manicure or other spa treatment. These are wonderful stress relievers. They are especially nice late in the day at the end of a hectic few days. Afterwards, you can go out for a quiet meal or go home and get some things done and then get a restful night's sleep.

9.Make sure you are doing some kind of regular exercise. This should be part of your life 52 weeks of the year. However, during high stress periods, it is more important. It is a fact that exercise increases energy and positive self–esteem and decreases depression. It is also a way to improve sleep and keep your weight in check.

10.Try to get some extra sleep. You will probably have to begin decompressing a little sooner than usual on those nights. Don't eat dinner too late, or eat anything too heavy. Avoid alcohol those nights. Get ready for bed and lie down with a good book or in front of a favorite show. If you exercised earlier, this will help you to be more relaxed and ready to sleep. Even one hour three times a week will make a difference in your mood and energy level.

Read these suggestions over carefully and consider which ones might be useful to you. After you have begun to implement them; take a deep breath, sit back, and drink in some of the lovely sights, sounds and smells of this cherished season.

Toni Coleman is a relationship coach who specializes in working with singles seeking lasting, healthy relationships. She has authored eclasses and designed a teleclass that teaches singles how to be successful in building a relationship. Her articles are published on many internet dating sites, where she is also a featured relationship coach.

Tips For Singles On Surviving (and enjoying) The Holidays

By Toni Coleman, LCSW

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Here you are, facing the holiday season alone. Have you been thinking about?

- *how alone and lonely you feel
- *excuses you can give family members as to why you can't come this year
- *what friends may be available to spend those long days with
- *how another year has passed and you are (still) single
- *how unfair it is that everyone else seems so happy and connected
- *how you will handle the office holiday party– single, take a friend, not attend
- *going to a far away (tropical?) place to escape it all
- *hiding out, alone, in your own home

If these thoughts sound familiar it is probably time to reflect on your feelings regarding this holiday season. If your goal is to hide out and endure it alone, you won't need to do too much planning. However, if you wish to experience at least a measure of the "peace and joy" associated with this time of year, you need to make and follow through with plans that allow you to participate in ways that are meaningful to YOU.

Remember, your senses are bombarded from October to December with music, images and Hallmark verses depicting the "right" experiences and expressions for the season. Remind yourself, every day if necessary, that there's nothing wrong with being single. You have the same need and right to enjoy this season as any couple or family does. How you choose to do this is up to you.

After you have done some serious reflection, consider the following list of holiday tips designed especially for singles.

Don't make plans out of a sense of obligation. This is also your holiday season. Set limits, make good choices and enjoy. You may ask yourself; "do I really want to go out"? If so, make your next question something like; "does it sound like something I would enjoy or be interested in?" Or, "will I have the opportunity to meet and mix with other singles?"

Avoid unrealistic expectations from others, from yourself and from the holidays themselves. Relax, enjoy and don't expect so much that you will feel hurt or disappointed when things don't turn out just as you had imagined. This will defeat all the positive feelings and experiences that you may have already

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gained.

Make sure you give thanks for all the blessings you do have in your life. Focusing on what you don't have only encourages negative thoughts. Add a prayer of hope for the things you would like to work for in the coming year.

Don't overbook OR overstay a good amount of time with relatives/friends. Sometimes a shorter stay works best and leaves you energy and space to get back to your own home and decompress.

Look for ways to give to or do for others. Feeling useful and appreciated will provide a great boost to your holiday spirits. Check into volunteer opportunities at local shelters and nursing homes or through any local church or non-profit group.

Don't plan to spend the entire holiday season with married /coupled family and friends. Seek out other singles and singles groups/ activities where you can feel relaxed and able to share with folks you have more in common with at this time. Better yet, plan a get together with other singles for one of the holidays. A festive potluck meal, tree trimming party or other holiday event would probably be much appreciated.

Do avoid using food, alcohol or drugs to cope with holiday stress. Nothing is worse than the feelings that follow the use (or wrong use) of these things. This way of coping leads to depression, low self-esteem and a greater sense of isolation and despair.

Do decorate your home with any and all things that make it feel more festive and fun for YOU. Tune into all those wonderful traditions you grew up with. It does not have to be very costly or time consuming to begin your own traditions in your own place. Don't put off or deny yourself those happy holiday expressions, as you wait for your significant other. Make your life all it can be right now.

Consider emphasizing the more spiritual aspects of the holiday. Go to a concert featuring religious holiday music or attend a church (or other) service, (even better with a friend).

Finally, going away to an exotic place may be just what you do need. Look into tour or vacation packages for singles. This may provide plenty of rest and relaxation and help you meet new friends and develop new interests.

Whatever you decide to do for your holidays, have fun and enjoy them. Focus on taking care of yourself and doing what is right for you. This way you will also be giving your best to those around you. Happy Holidays!

Toni Coleman is a relationship coach in Virginia. She specializes in working with singles who want to create lasting, intimate relationships. Toni has over 20 years experience in relationship coaching with singles and couples. She has written numerous email classes for singles on all aspects of meeting, dating and relating. She is the author of *The Art of Intimacy*, which goes out to thousands of subscribers monthly.



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