



EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to the NJ Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter! EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance. **The EAS Employee Newsletter** contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace.*

Managing the Stress of the Holidays

The holidays are a joyous time for many, but can come with additional activities and responsibilities that can be quite stressful.

Did You Know?

You can make a confidential appointment with an EAS Counselor to help you with holiday stress. Contact EAS at 866-327-9133 to make an appointment.

Phone: 866-327-9133

Web: www.state.nj.us/csc

Email: EAS_help@csc.nj.gov

Ten Holiday Tips

Each year, December brings a month filled with holidays and celebrations complete with a variety of gift giving traditions. Check out this list of holiday tips to keep you and your family safe and healthy this holiday season.

- 1. Buy safe toys.** If you plan to buy toys for the kids in your life, choose age-appropriate toys and look for labels with safety advice. For young children, avoid toys with small parts, sharp edges, and electric toys that can heat up. Always purchase safety gear in addition to sports-related gifts or ride-on toys, such as bicycles or skateboards.
- 2. Celebrate on a budget.** The holidays can be expensive, but you don't have to break the bank to celebrate. Take a few minutes to decide how much you can afford to spend on gifts, travel, parties, decorations, and other holiday expenses. Once you've created a spending plan, keep track of your purchases. Shopping online can help you stick to a budget, as you'll avoid the temptation of store displays and may be able to use coupons and promotion codes. Before you buy, look for free shipping offers, check ordering deadlines to ensure that your gifts will arrive on time, and read the return policy.
- 3. Give the gift of service.** Sometimes the greatest gift you can give to others is service. Reading to a child just 3 hours a week significantly improves his or her reading skills, or if you help out at a local soup kitchen or food bank, you are directly providing meals to hungry individuals.
- 4. Find seasonal employment.** Even in a tough economy, businesses need extra help around the holidays. Seasonal employment can help supplement your income and potentially lead to a permanent position.
- 5. Get through the holiday blues.** The holidays aren't joyous for everyone. This time of year can bring stress and feelings of loneliness. Exercise, focusing on positive relationships, and doing things that you find rewarding can help with depression. Keep in mind that winter depression could be a sign of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which is caused by the lack of sunlight. Treatment for SAD is much like treatment for other forms of depression, but may also involve light therapy. Don't forget to call EAS for confidential assistance if you are experiencing stress, anxiety, or feeling down this holiday season. They are here to help!
- 6. Be safe and save money with LED lights.** Electricity bills can grow during the holidays if you decorate with strings of lights. Consider switching to LED (light-emitting diode) holiday lights to save energy and money. In addition to the energy and cost savings, LED lights are much cooler than incandescent bulbs, reducing the risk of fires. Every holiday season, fires claim lives and cost millions in damage. To prevent holiday fires in your home, use nonflammable decorations, do not overload electrical sockets, and avoid the use of lit candles. As you should do year-round, ensure that your smoke alarms are working. If you celebrate Christmas, be sure to regularly water pine Christmas trees.
- 7. Pay attention to food portions and physical activity.** The holidays are a wonderful time to celebrate with family and friends, but celebrations sometimes involve over-indulging in sweet treats and heavy foods. Even if you only gain only 1 or 2 pounds during the holidays, these gains can add up over the years. The holidays are probably not the ideal time to try to lose weight, but you can take steps to maintain your weight.
- 8. Pack for hassle-free air travel.** You can get through the airport security line faster by traveling with unwrapped gifts and following the "3-1-1 rule" when carrying on liquids. You may have favorite liquid food items (like cranberry sauce or special dips) that you want to share during the holidays, but it's best to put such items in your checked bag or ship them ahead of time. If you need last-minute information about what you can and can't bring through security, visit the TSA Web site at <http://www.tsa.gov/>.
- 9. Reduce holiday waste.** The holiday season includes many opportunities to reduce waste, recycle, and reuse items. Consider buying rechargeable batteries (and a charger) for electronic gifts to help reduce the amount of harmful materials thrown away. After the holidays, look for ways to recycle your tree instead of sending it to a landfill. If you plan to send greeting cards, consider purchasing ones that are made of recycled paper or sending electronic greetings.
- 10. Keep food safe.** Holiday buffets are convenient ways to entertain a crowd, but leaving food out for long periods of time can invite bacteria that cause food-borne illness. To keep your holiday foods safe, cook them thoroughly; use shallow containers; never leave them sitting out for more than two hours, and keep them at the appropriate temperature.

Source: USA.gov. (Updated 2014, September 3). 10 holiday tips. Retrieved September 8, 2016, from <http://www.usa.gov/>

Make the Holidays Your Own

So it's that time of year again. You take one look at the calendar and you're hit with pictures of perfect holidays. There are kids frolicking in the snow, big families laughing around a huge meal, and smitten couples exchanging gifts in front of the fireplace. The pressure is on to make the traditional holiday images come to life—or else!

But what about those people who aren't included those snapshots? What if you are single, without little ones to decorate the Christmas tree or light menorah candles? More and more people are divorced and part of blended families who are dealing with multiple traditions in the same house. The truth is that lots of families today don't have a mom, a dad, and 2.5 Norman Rockwell children. And for many people, the pressure becomes too much. If you don't belong in a traditional holiday portrait you can still make the holidays your own by creating your own traditions.

Figure out what you want.

Basically, holiday stress is caused by unrealistic expectations. During the holidays, everyone, particularly those people who don't live anywhere near "It's a Wonderful Life," can use a reminder to think about their own needs and desires for this time of year and not focus on what they've come to believe they should do.

Before the holidays, spend some time with yourself. Set aside a couple of days to examine what you're really looking for during the holidays. If you had it your way, how would you paint the picture? Are the holidays about extended family, or about solitude? Is this the time to explore cultural roots and reconnect with religion, or a chance to reach out to strangers? Forget about what everyone else says or what your mother has always done, what do you want your holiday traditions to be?

Going It Alone, or Not

If you're single, you might look into doing volunteer work at a local soup kitchen, food bank, or homeless shelter. Or maybe you want to do something totally self-indulgent. What's stopping you from spending a day relaxing at a spa, hiking or biking, or hopping on a plane and enjoying the holidays at the beach? Rely upon your family or friends who may have all sorts of interesting things planned. Also, friends with kids are not off limits during the holidays. If you want to be around children, find the families in your circle who'll welcome a guest to a holiday meal, and then ask what you can contribute. Maybe you're helping them fulfill their tradition.

The holidays also tend to put extra pressure on new relationships, whether it's a new romance or a new family unit. Keep in mind that now is not the time to force things. Concentrate on what's truly at the core of the holidays for you and find ways to embrace that together. Have fun. Chances are the new people in your life will feel relief as well without having to rush into a situation loaded with expectations.

Blending a family means staying flexible.

Blended families are faced with a particular challenge during the holidays. For kids and adults, thinking about celebrations past inevitably brings back memories, good and bad. It's important to talk about what each side of the family used to do, and what the new family can do now to make things special. Be flexible. It may be combining traditions or it may be starting fresh. Planning can get complicated if the holidays are divided between families, but kids often don't mind celebrating more than once—in a different way in each home—no matter what date the celebration happens to fall upon.

Make a list of no's.

Come up with a list of all the things that are not part of your ideal holiday, even if you may not be able to realistically eliminate them. Do you really want to deal with expensive gifts this year? Must you make an appearance at your neighbor's annual party? Do you have to invite your husband's ex-wife over for dinner? Include everything that makes you nervous just thinking about it. Call it a stress list.

Then practice saying no. It may sound silly, but practice it in front of the mirror. You'll probably find out that it works remarkably well when the time comes. And if not, at least you spoke up.

Timing is everything.

If you decide to shake your holidays up a bit you'll probably want to start planning early. Don't ambush your loved ones at the last minute by opting out of the family meal and announcing a solo trip to Mexico, or throw a new tradition at the kids on Christmas Eve. You may have shifted your outlook, but it could take some time for the rest of the world to join you.

Change isn't always easy, especially when people are bombarded with old-fashioned images of holidays past that probably were not ever quite real. But once you can let go of the unrealistic expectations, visualize what you need, and take the holidays into your own hands, you are one step closer to having a stress-free season truly worth remembering.

If you find yourself feeling stressed, anxious, sad, or overwhelmed this holiday season, reach out to EAS for confidential assistance. EAS can help you to *make the holidays your own and manage stress for a more enjoyable holiday season.*

Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). Make the holidays your own. Raleigh, NC: Author.

Realistic & Healthy Holiday Eating Tips

The holidays are a time to enjoy friends, family, and food. And contrary to popular belief, you can have all three without worrying about putting on extra pounds! The secret...mindful preparation and mindful eating!

Don't skip meals throughout the day. This will likely result in overeating later. Eat balanced meals and snacks just like any other day, including breakfast! Research shows that those who eat this important morning meal tend to consume fewer calories throughout the day.

Include lots of fiber in your diet by eating fruits, vegetables, beans, legumes and whole grains. High-fiber foods are high in volume and will satisfy hunger, but are lower in calories. Plus beans and legumes are easy on the food budget. Add lentils to soups, mix half black beans with half lean meat for tacos, add chickpeas to salads, snack on edamame beans and use hummus instead of mayo.

Choose a broth-based soup instead of a creamy soup. When making soup, use a low-sodium broth and add lots of different vegetables, beans and spices. To make a thicker soup without the cream, puree vegetables such as cauliflower, squash or carrots. They create a velvety texture with a lot less calories.

Use a smaller plate. Less room on your plate encourages proper portion sizes.

Start each meal by filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables. If you wait until the end to add fruits and vegetables, you often run out of room.

Ask yourself is this food calorie worthy? Does this food taste good enough for me to spend some of my calories on? Try not to fill your plate with everything just because it's in the buffet line. And if Grandma's apple pie is calorie worthy, enjoy a piece!

Eat slow and savor every bit. Give yourself a little time before going back for seconds. Wait to see if you really are still hungry.

After eating, get in some physical activity! Find a new bike trail, walk the neighborhood to look at holiday lights, go ice skating, or play a game with the kids.

Source: Stay Mindful with 4 Tips for Holiday Eating and Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less – Holiday Challenge Daily Tips. Retrieved November 21, 2019, from <https://healthysd.gov/realistic-healthy-holiday-eating-tips/>

Healthy Winter Travel

Whether traveling to warmer weather or a snow-filled adventure, make sure the flu is not your travel companion. Get your flu vaccine before you go to reduce your risk of catching and spreading the flu.

Wherever you may be going this winter, protecting yourself and others from the flu is important. Here are some useful tips for staying healthy during the winter months.

Before Your Trip

Get vaccinated. Vaccines are the most important tool we have for preventing the flu. If you have not gotten your vaccine already, it's important to get it before you travel. Flu vaccine is available in many places, including doctors' offices, health departments, and pharmacies. Getting vaccinated now is a great way to protect yourself against the flu.

Are you traveling outside of the United States this winter?

- Learn about health information for your destination.
- Before you travel, see a doctor familiar with travel medicine to get any vaccines, medicines, and information you need to stay healthy.
- Talk to your doctor if you are at high risk for flu complications. Depending on your situation, your doctor may advise you to take antiviral medications with you when you travel, especially if appropriate medical care is not available at your destination.
- Know what to do if you become sick or injured on your trip.
- Are you visiting an area where there is a risk of malaria? If so, then seek medical care right away if you have a fever. The first symptoms of malaria usually include fever and chills, similar to the symptoms of the flu. However, if malaria is left untreated, the disease can quickly become serious and even life threatening.

Prepare a travel health kit. Remember that prevention can be travel-sized! Include items in your kit that might be helpful if you get sick, such as tissues, pain or fever medicine, soap, and an alcohol-based hand rub to use in case soap and water are not available.

Travel only when you feel well. Watch out for symptoms of flu before your trip. If you think you have the flu or otherwise feel ill, delay your travel plans until your fever has been gone for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. Even if it means missing out on your plans, staying away from others when you're sick can help protect everyone's health. If you have worrisome signs or symptoms, seek medical care.

During Your Trip

Take these everyday steps to protect your health and the health of others:

- Remember to travel only when you feel well.
- Cover your coughs or sneezes with a tissue. No tissue? Then cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Updated 2011, December 19). Flu-free, healthy travel this winter. Retrieved September 8, 2016, from <http://www.cdc.gov/>