

# Topic of the Month

# November

Turn The Holiday Blues into Holiday Brights

QUESTIONS? Contact ANH at 1.800.556.1548

## The holiday season is upon us ...

...and for many people it is a favorite time of year marked by celebrations, exchanging gifts with family and friends, and optimistic hopes for the future. Unfortunately, these year-end festivities can have some unpleasant side effects, often called the "holiday blues" and the "post-holiday let downs," that can bring on sadness, stress, fatigue, and even sleeplessness. Whatever the underlying cause may be, overspending unrealistic expectations, inability to be with one's family or loved ones, shopping frenzy – these factors can deliver a one-two punch to your mood and energy level.

Learn how to avoid the holiday blues and embrace the holiday brights instead by following these simple but effective tips from the nation's top mental health professionals.

**Keep holiday expectations realistic.** Examine your to-do lists of gift giving, entertaining, visiting, decorating, and personal priorities and ask yourself, "Are these realistic?" Make adjustments to conform to reality.

**Plan well in advance.** If you think you can accomplish everything you need to do in two weeks, allow yourself double that amount of time so you won't be setting yourself up for failure.

**Control your holiday debt.** Develop a spending plan, avoid the plastic and go for the green instead, lend a hand to people in need, and communicate your affection for others by giving thoughtful, not expensive, gifts. (see "Fake Out the Financial Freak-Out" opposite.)

**Pace yourself.** Learn to work as a team member and delegate some of the tasks of the holiday to family and friends who will be more than happy to be included in the special activities.



**Maintain a balanced diet.** Eat and drink in moderation to avoid the post-holiday depressing weight gain.

**Spend time with people who care about you. Surround yourself with a support system during these special times.** Reach out to make new friends or contact someone with whom you have lost touch.

**Enjoy the holiday activities even after the holiday period.** To help avoid a post-holiday let down, spread out beyond the holidays the fun and frolic that brought you peace and happiness.

**Turn up the music.** Listen to it, sing with it, play it if you can. Music is medicine for the soul.

**Find the humor.** You have got to laugh at something, so find a funny movie, read something funny, be funny!

**Exercise. Exercise. Exercise.** Walk, run, dance, jump rope to feel good. Write down all of the things that make you stressed out on the soles of your shoes. Get out and walk all over town until the list is worn off!

**Ask for help.** Whether you consult with a close friend, family member, or professional counselor, every person born can profit from talking it over with someone.

**Do something in memory of a departed loved one or create a new remembrance ritual.** Consider lighting a special candle, playing a favorite song, donating the money that would have been spent on a gift to their favorite cause, or planting a tree in memory and watching it grow and prosper each year.

### Stress Buster #1:

### Fake Out the Financial Freak-Out

**Fact:** On average, Americans spend the first six months of every year paying off the holiday debt from the previous year.

If you are like the majority of today's consumers, you simply cannot afford to spend a lot of money on gifts this year. So, to avoid the inevitable chest pains when the credit card bills arrive in January, follow these easy tips:

- Allocate your budget before you start shopping.
- Shop early to avoid last-minute grabbing frenzy.
- Avoid compensatory giving – overspending on someone because you feel guilty or you simply want to impress this person.
- Make simple presents look special by adding a unique addition to the wrapping, like a photo or pretty picture.
- Give gifts that come primarily from the heart, not from the wallet.

**Remember, keeping your expenses under control can actually result in stronger relationships, better emotional, spiritual, and physical health and great financial savings!**

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### Stress Buster #2: Take Control of Binge Eating

**Fact: The average American gains 10+ pounds between the Thanksgiving and New Year's festivities.**

This extra weight gain can weigh heavily on your stress level. So, when the urge to binge strikes, make it harder for you to satisfy it. How? Create obstacles between you and your snacks. For example, banish junk food from your home; if you crave it later, you'll have to get up and leave the house to go get some. Also, divvy up munchies into single serving bags. Make one portion easily accessible; store the rest in a hard to reach place so it's tougher to eat a whole box of something. At parties and dinner, make a vow to have 2 servings, no more.

### Stress Buster #3: Tame the Family Tension

**Fact: Family friction heats up during the holidays.**

The high-pressure environment of the holiday season may cause family conflicts to arise, raising your stress level. Here are four ways to keep cool when you're home with the family for the holidays:

1. Keep your expectations realistic and remember that no one is perfect.
2. Decompress and relax before a family gathering.
3. Sidestep arguments and deflect critical comments.
4. Avoid getting into touchy topics by simply setting a time to talk about it at a later date.

### Stress Buster #4: Spruce Up Your Space

**Fact: Personal surroundings have a direct effect on personal mood.**

If your lack of decorating funds is adding to your anxiety, it's easy and inexpensive to make your home feel more festive for the holidays. Try these unique and creative ideas from professional party planner Bryan Rafanelli:

- Turn apples into candleholders. Carve a circle in the top of a red or green apple, hollow-out the middle, and insert a votive.

- Single-fy your holiday tree by decorating with ornaments that have a single theme, like shape or color, in common. Why not try stars in different sizes and colors, or snowflakes – no two are exactly alike!
- Make your place settings extra special by folding your napkins into squares and then wrapping each one with a piece of ribbon, as if it's a little present.
- Add color your any room by filling clear bowls and vases with seasonally colored candies. Think red and green for Christmas; blue and white for Hanukkah, and silver and white for New Year's.

### Stress Buster #5: Gifting on the Job

**Fact: Most employees don't have a clue about on-the-job gift-giving etiquette.**

If deciding which of your co-workers you should buy gifts for is causing you undue holiday stress, follow the advice of **Allison Hemming**, author of "Work It!"

- Give a present to your boss, but make it something simple; a little token like stationery or a CD of his/her favorite band is just fine.
- If you work closely with one or two other managers, follow the same line.
- If you're part of a big team, suggest a secret Santa-like gift exchange with a price limit and this way you only need to purchase one gift.
- If you must treat several co-workers, edible goods are an economical and much appreciated way to go. Try home-made cookies or brownies.
- For those co-workers that you are really close to, do a gift exchange outside of the office to avoid any hurt feelings among other colleagues.

### Stress Buster #6: Turn Sleeplessness into Sleepiness

**Fact: More stress equals less sleep.**

To turn the equation around, try using this guided imagery technique to discover the trick to getting your mind to wind down gradually instead of stewing about how late it is: Think of a pleasurable experience you had, and then try to recall every single detail of it as if you were reliving it. As you replay the memory, many previously forgotten aspects – smells, sounds, textures – will resurface. You'll be relaxed and snoozing before the mental movie is complete.



**DID YOU KNOW...**  
Feeling frazzled by the festivities? Mentally picturing a loved one will lower your blood pressure and help you calm down. **(Source: "Stress Free for Good" by Fred Liskin)**

### How to Look Cool, Calm, and Collected When You're Really Crazy

Cross your ankles to prevent fidgeting when nervous – this will ground you.

Take 5 to 10 deep breaths to slow your breathing when you feel frenzied.

Concentrate on relaxing the muscles of your face – forehead, eyes, jaw – to achieve that serene look.

Tame your tension by simply saying to yourself "Stop!" Your body language will communicate that you're less on edge.

Recite a mood-relaxing mantra like "I am feeling calm". This will create an emotional boundary that protects you from other people's stress.

**Yes, Virginia, there really is an Upside to Stress.**

**Fact: A little stress may actually enhance your body's ability to fight the flu by boosting the production of specialized immune cells that fight the virus. (Ohio State University study)**

**For more information on this topic, please consult with a Certified Credit Counselor at 1.800.556.1548 or visit our Learning Center at [www.anewhorizon.org](http://www.anewhorizon.org)**

