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DEALING WITH HOLIDAY STRESS

The holidays are supposed to be a happy time, but for many people, they are not. You may see people in your community exhibiting more stress than normal. Holiday expectations piled on top of already full lives can be difficult. In addition, the holidays can bring up feelings of loneliness for some who see others with rich lives and wonder “why not me?”

According to a 2014 report from the American Institute of Stress, work is the number one reason people feel stressed. Job pressure ranks before money and health stressors. And, more than 75% of people surveyed report that they regularly experience physical symptoms as a result of that stress. Research from the American Psychological Association found that women are more likely than men to report an increase in stress during the holidays.

With all this added stress, the holidays are a perfect time to reach out to your community with messages about self-care. Here are some helpful holiday stress tips to help your community stay healthy during the holidays.

1. Set reasonable expectations and don't expect the holiday season to be perfect.
2. Practice healthy drinking habits. Alcohol is a depressant and can exacerbate feelings of stress and sadness. Too much alcohol can also interfere with healthy sleep and interrupt natural sleep cycles.
3. Keep up your exercise regimen as it will provide effective stress relief and productive alone time. A short daily walk can have a big impact.
4. Set spending limits and stick to them. Over-spending during the holidays can lead to continued stress down the road.
5. Treat your body well with balanced nutrition but don't feel guilty when indulging during the holidays. Moderation is key and is a far healthier response to holiday treats than starvation.
6. Create a space and time for yourself during family gatherings. Take a walk outside, find a quiet corner in the house, or make a quick trip to the store to gather your thoughts and relax.
7. Plan any shopping and cooking in advance. Setting a schedule and making priorities will prevent too much from piling up at the last minute.
8. Talk to someone. Seek support and affirmation of how your expectations for the season don't always match with reality. A good listener and a little laugh can be great stress relievers.

Remind your community members that if they have anxiety, sadness, or a mood that interferes with sleeping, eating or other usual activities, they may want to seek professional treatment. Sometimes holiday blues are more than just passing emotions and can be something more serious like depression, anxiety, or a related disorder.

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI advocates for access to services, treatment, supports and research and is steadfast in its commitment to raising awareness and building a community of hope for all of those in need.