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Tips for a Safe, Healthy Holiday

Bennington and Manchester, Vt. — Now is the time to take stock and plan for a safe and healthy holiday season. With a little planning, you'll have a road map to help you navigate a happy holiday. And you'll have the energy you need to handle a busy and stressful time.

Planning ahead is a great way to reduce holiday stress. A predictable schedule helps keep the peace. Try to keep to a normal routine. Change can disorient you and the whole family. As you put together your holiday calendar, be realistic. Be practical about what you can and cannot do.

Many things can throw you off your routine. Extra parties, extra food, extra demands on your wallet!

Before you know it, you're routine is gone. Be sure to stick to the healthy parts of your routine. To keep your finances healthy, set your spending limit and stick to it. Get regular exercise, eat regular portions, drink water regularly.

And while we're on the subject of drinking, be sure to keep alcohol consumption to a minimum. Excessive drinking will only make you feel worse. If you host a party, remember to offer lots of non-alcoholic drinks and healthy, nutritious food.

Excessive eating doesn't make you feel good either, but what's a person to do when there is so much food around? Of course, you can always "just say no!, thanks." You can fill up on low-cal, low-carb, low-sugar foods, like veggies and fruits. You can also hold the line by limiting your exposure. Come late to parties and leave early. Don't expect to lose weight, though—it's the holidays!

A busy holiday schedule can be a recipe for pressure and anxiety. And of course, lots of stress can lead to other health problems. Filling your days with activities and social events gets tiring. Be sure to make time for yourself. Everybody needs to allow time to relax, get enough sleep, and get your batteries recharged.

To slow things down, take a realistic look at holiday traditions. They can be a double-edged experience. They are important and meaningful, but they can also be a lot of effort. If you find your traditions are getting burdensome—or maybe you're the only one shouldering the work—talk with your family about making changes to make them easier.

Approach family members gently, because they can have deep attachments to family traditions. Explain your concerns and put ideas out there for discussion: "What do you think if...?" That way family members won't feel threatened and can be more creative and flexible in helping you make changes. After all, if everyone can manage more easily, the traditions will be more enjoyable for all.

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The holidays can give rise to a range of emotions. Usually holiday blues come from a well-known source, although they can seem to blow up without warning. Strong emotions can come from many different kinds of experiences. For example, it could be the death of a loved one, illness, divorce, or job loss. Or it could be the financial demands, hectic shopping, family reunions, and visitors.

To combat holiday blues, forget about perfection. Acknowledge your feelings, and don't ignore them. But realize that holiday blues usually pass with the holidays. Don't dwell on the past, good or bad. Just keep moving ahead. It will be January before you know it.

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