

**2015, Holiday Stress:
“It’s the Most Wonderful (Stressful) Time of the Year”
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

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While it is generally acknowledged that “the holidays” are stressful, most people seem to just accept that it will be stressful and continue to do what they normally do during the "silly season". A few people will have the notion that they don't have to keep subjecting themselves to the same level of stress and emotional distress year after year, and will start telling themselves "this year it will be different". Of those, only a handful will actually take any action to reduce their stress by changing their old thinking, feelings, and behavior.

“The Holidays” are stressful because we are called upon to do more with our time, energy and other resources, as the demands of the season increase. During this time of the year, normal stressors (e.g., job, family, kids’ activities, ailing parents, paying bills) don’t go away because it is Christmastime or Thanksgiving. We add in shopping, decorating, additional cleaning, Christmas cards, holiday travel, etc. and the demands just keep increasing. Stress is the perception that the supply of time, energy, money, and other resources are insufficient to handle the demand for them. We don't believe that we will be up to the challenge.

We “dread” the holidays because (at least in part) we already feel behind before we become aware that we have entered the holiday stress zone. We set out blindly to accomplish these additional challenges without additional resources. Some of try to plan ahead by buying Christmas or Thanksgiving stuff at the end of last season. Maybe we bought some presents during the year. Hopefully we will be able to remember where we put all this stuff in time for the holidays this year.

The typical lists that you read every year about managing holiday stress usually involve basic self-care (i.e. eat right, exercise, get enough rest/sleep, etc.), develop a budget (and stick to it), [shop early and/or shop online](#), and have realistic expectations about your available time and energy (say “yes” to some things and “no” to others. It is equally as important to have realistic expectations about the

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people in your life. If you expect that the people that you care about will magically be transformed into the people you want them to be, you will be disappointed. Part of “realistic expectations” is letting go of notions of perfection. Most of us would be well-advised to take our “to do” list and take about half the items off the list—simply let go of those things. The same can be said of the grievance lists that we may carry around for our long standing relationships. Let go of old resentments and feel the freedom that comes from that. You don’t have to just accept that you are going to be stressed out, that you will survive it, and then it will be over—only to be repeated next year. You can do some things differently.



**The Recovering Person's Guide
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(41 Pages)

By Peggy L. Ferguson Ph.D, LADC, LMFT

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