

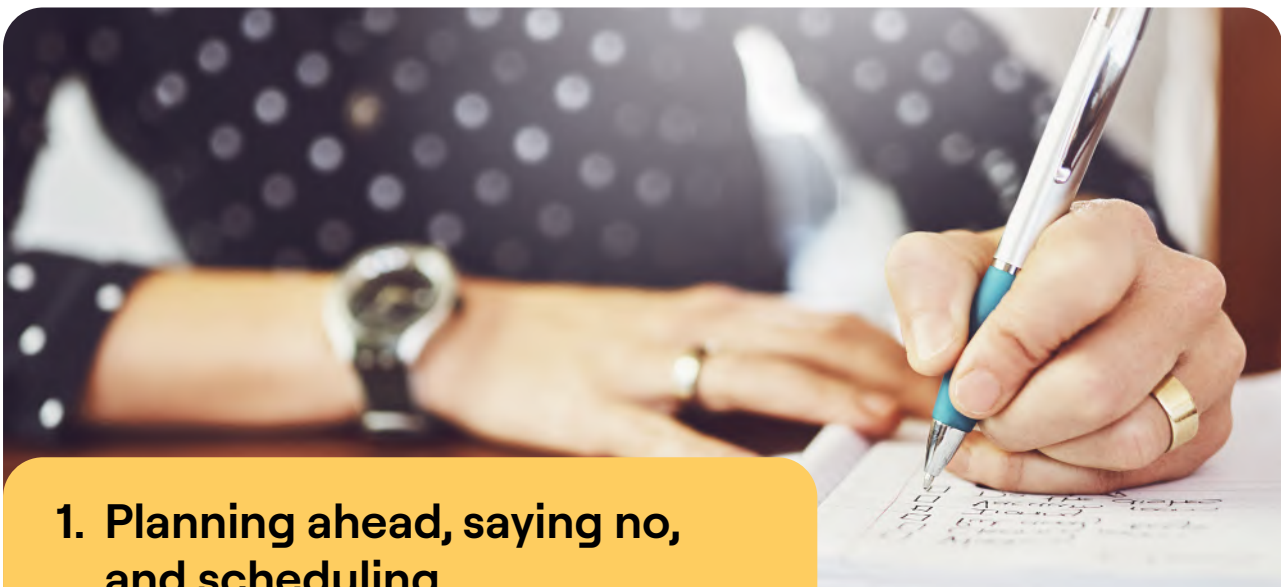
A photograph of a woman with curly hair and glasses, wearing a white sweater, looking down thoughtfully. In the background, a Christmas tree is decorated with red ornaments and blue lights.

## 5 Effective strategies for handling stress and anxiety this festive season

The festive season, while full of joy and celebrations, can also bring a unique blend of stressors. This strain is often known as 'festive season stress'. Unlike the everyday stress we encounter in our daily lives, it tends to be more intense and specific, largely due to the expectations and obligations associated with the festive season.

## Stress and triggers

Situational stress unique to the festive season, includes symptoms like anxiety and headaches, similar to everyday stress. What distinguishes it is its connection to specific pressures, such as hosting events, meeting expectations, handling extra financial demands, family dynamics such as dealing with difficult relatives, and feelings of loneliness, especially for those isolated or grieving. The pursuit of an ideal celebration can intensify these pressures, making regular stress feel even more overwhelming.



### 1. Planning ahead, saying no, and scheduling

The festive season's flurry of activities and commitments can be overwhelming but planning ahead and the ability to say "no" are key to managing stress. Planning includes scheduling events, designing menus, or setting a spending budget, ensuring a smoother season. Saying "no" is particularly powerful, preventing overcommitment and unnecessary stress. It's not just about declining social invitations; it also applies to an uncontrollable to-do list, where delegation and asking for help are essential. It's equally important to schedule downtime. Consciously setting aside periods for rest and self-care, you give yourself the chance to recharge both physically and mentally.

## 2. Balancing diet, sleep, and regular physical activity

During the festive season, it's tempting to overindulge, but health should remain a priority. A balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables provides essential nutrients and wards off diseases. Limiting portions and avoiding too much high-fat, salty, and sugary foods, while enjoying treats in moderation, helps maintain fitness.

Adequate sleep, six to eight hours nightly, enhances mood and energy, preventing mental health issues. Regular exercise, at least two-and-a-half hours weekly, possibly with friends, enjoying walks, or in a gym, supports fitness goals.

Maintaining regular routines, planning, setting boundaries, and incorporating restful activities like meditation or yoga helps achieve work-life balance, reduces stress, and ensures time for relaxation and mental well-being.

## 3. Creating relaxing surroundings

The environment plays a crucial role in influencing mood and stress, especially during the hectic festive season. Creating a calm and organised space can significantly reduce stress by fostering tranquillity and efficiency.

Simple changes can make a big difference, such as decluttering, removing unnecessary items, and organising your surroundings. Introducing sensory elements like soothing fragrances or soft music can enhance well-being, and research supports the positive effects of citrus scents and music. Embracing natural light by opening blinds or curtains promotes happiness and peace. These efforts aim not for perfection but for a comfortable, relaxed space that enhances the experience.



#### 4. Communicating and sharing feelings

The festive season, though filled with joy, can also lead to stress and anxiety. Open communication with loved ones is a vital strategy to manage these emotions. Keeping feelings bottled up can exacerbate stress, so expressing emotions, whether it's about preparations, financial worries, or loneliness, can lighten the emotional load. Friends and family may offer new perspectives or assistance. Social interactions, even if selective, are essential in alleviating stress, providing a sense of belonging and support. Essentially, communication and social connections are dual strategies that not only help unburden oneself but also strengthen relationships, making them more enjoyable and less stressful.



## 5. Respect differences and be realistic

During festive gatherings, a mix of beliefs, opinions, and lifestyles can lead to disagreements and conflicts. To reduce stress, it's vital to consciously respect these differences. A key strategy is acknowledging and valuing others' viewpoints, even if they clash with yours. Encourage open conversation but steer clear of contentious subjects that might spark tension. The aim is to promote unity and goodwill, not unnecessary strife. Appreciating the diversity in your social circle can foster a harmonious atmosphere.

Managing personal expectations is also crucial. The pressure to create a 'perfect' celebration can cause stress, but it's vital to remember that perfection isn't what defines the festive spirit. Focus on what truly matters: quality time with loved ones, cherished memories, and the joy of the season. Embrace the fact that things may not always go as planned, and that's fine.

The festive season, while a time of joy and celebration, can also bring unique challenges and stressors. The strategies outlined provide an approach to managing stress, allowing for a more relaxed and fulfilling festive experience.

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