

# Peninsula's

HOLIDAY  
SURVIVAL GUIDE

# 2023

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# Happy Holidays!

The holiday season is usually a time for celebrating with our friends and family. However, for many it can also be an emotional time dealing with stress and anxiety, and sometimes sadness and fatigue. Holidays can be difficult to navigate, and that's why our team at Peninsula developed this Holiday Survival Guide.

Included in this year's guide, our team has compiled tip sheets and other helpful articles to help you navigate a wide variety of scenarios such as concerns about overspending on holiday gifts, avoiding holiday weight gain, or navigating a holiday celebration now that you're sober, and many more.

I hope that you're able to enjoy the holidays, and spend time with the ones you love. As always, Peninsula is here if you need us. Thank you for entrusting us with your health.

Warm Regards,




Chief Administrative Officer,  
Parkwest Medical Center



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\*  While any page can be printed, topics with printer icons have special tip sheets to serve as easy reminders for dealing with specific holiday stressors.

# Have a Plan and Set Boundaries

## Make a List, Check it Twice

### START THINKING ABOUT THE HOLIDAYS EARLY.

Think about the current state of your life: your finances, your health, and any other obligations you must meet during the time between Thanksgiving and New Year's. These are non-negotiable. Then sit down with a calendar and fill in all the dates you already know are booked. You'll be surprised how much it helps to actually see your commitments written out. Keep the calendar in a place the entire family can access, such as the refrigerator door.

### NOW YOU'RE READY TO DEVELOP A HOLIDAY PLAN:

**Be realistic.** Accept that your holidays will not resemble a Hallmark greeting card or a Norman Rockwell painting – and that's OK. Your holiday can be anything you want it to be, so give yourself permission to do what you want, not what you think is expected of you.

**Make a list – really.** Making lists can help you prioritize what needs to be done, what can wait and what can be skipped if need be. Do things ahead of time if you can, and don't sweat the small stuff. People eat grocery store cookies just as easily as homemade cookies.

**Make a budget and stick to it.** The only thing worse than Aunt Mabel's fruitcake is a pile of credit card bills when the holidays are over. Gifts don't need to be expensive, and going into unnecessary debt will be a burden in the new year.

**Delegate.** Surprise! You're only human and you shouldn't have to do everything yourself. Enlist the help of family and friends to do cooking, cleaning, decorating and even gift wrapping!

**Take care of YOU.** While preparing for the holidays, don't forget to care for yourself. Eat well, sleep plenty, exercise and take a little time for yourself each day. A hot bath, mug of cocoa or a good book can do wonders for your mental health.

**Learn to say NO.** Saying no isn't necessarily selfish. When you say no to a new commitment, you're honoring your existing obligations and ensuring that you'll be able to devote quality time to them.

## Can you pass the holiday stress test?

### Five Signs You May be Stressed:

- You're irritable.
- You're losing sleep.
- You're losing or gaining weight.
- You feel tense, with muscle aches or headaches.
- You feel overwhelmed.

*Peninsula can help you manage your stress. For help, visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) or call 865-970-9800.*



# In the Beginning

## Put Your Lists to Good Use

**Now that you have your plan** and know what you want to accomplish – and more importantly, what you can accomplish – it’s time to get started!

### DECK THE HALLS

**Holiday cards:** Enlist help from older children in addressing cards. Write one “here’s-what-our-family-has-been-doing” letter to include in the card. For more tech-savvy friends and family, consider sending an e-card. It’s free, saves time and is a way to go green this holiday season.

**Cleaning:** Clean only what is most necessary and save your deep-cleaning for after the holidays. With small children, make a game of tidying up and dusting. Put on some favorite music, and have them race to complete a room before the song is finished. Assign a family member to wipe down counter tops and sinks each day. It takes just a few seconds, but will save a lot of cleaning time in the long haul. If possible, you might want to consider having someone come in and clean for you before you put up the tree and decorations. Just watch the budget!

**Decorating:** Sometimes less is more. Inexpensive candles of the same color and varying sizes, along with ribbons and bows used throughout a room, can unify holiday decorations. Make it easier for next year when you take down your decorations this year. For example, put each string of lights in a plastic bag and label it by location such as “mantle.” Wrap each strand of lights neatly so you are not spending valuable time untangling them next year.

**Gift wrapping:** Get help with gift wrapping. So what if others don’t wrap exactly like you do? Use gift bags and boxes to save time, or have your children stamp colorful images on plain gift bags or brown craft paper.

**Did you know that the “Twelve Days of Christmas” signify the traditional Christmas season beginning December 25 and ending on January 6 (Epiphany)? While Santa has a December 25 deadline, the rest of us can be more flexible.**

### ENTERTAINING

**Don’t be pressured by the calendar:** Leave the tree up a little longer. Postpone a Christmas gathering until December 27 or 28, when guests are more relaxed.

**Entertaining to go:** If you’re not comfortable having people over, take the party out of the house. Organize a group to take a tour of the holiday lights in an auto caravan. Organize a make-your-own holiday ornament craft for the kids. Finish the evening with coffee and treats outside by the firepit.

**Group outings:** Organize a group outing to the ice rink, theme park or indoor pool for out-of-the-ordinary entertainment. Order pizza or take advantage of the concession stand. Take photos, and send one to each guest as a post-party favor.

**Share the fun:** Think outside of the box this year for fun ways to celebrate during the holidays. Make celebrations a team effort at work and a family activity at home. Children can do simple preparation tasks and help with clean-up as well. Play some holiday music and make it fun!

*Need additional help dealing with stress? Visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.*



# Tip: Shop Smarter, Not Harder

**Make a holiday shopping list.** Write down everyone who will receive a gift from you this year, then list ideas for suitable presents and where you are going to buy them. Remember to include smaller gifts for people like teachers and babysitters. Keep a few generic gifts on hand, just in case someone unexpected stops by. Homemade candy, cakes and pies, as well as decorative candles, are inexpensive yet thoughtful gifts.

**Make a budget.** Know how much you have to spend, and then spend only what is reasonable and affordable to you. Set a budget of \$10 for all of your smaller gifts. Budget \$25 maximum for friends or suggest going out for a nice meal as a group. Consider giving a family gift such as a board game or gift certificate to a restaurant. Stick to it.

**Shop early for holiday presents.** Don't wait for the eleventh hour. With all of the pre-holiday sales, there's no reason not to dedicate some time and closet space for storing gifts. A bonus: you'll likely find your preferences such as color, sizes and styles in stock, which will prevent last-minute overcompensation. Just make sure to confirm the store's return/exchange policy, and always ask for a gift receipt.

**Spread holiday shopping over weeks.** Shopping early means gift buying can be done at a leisurely pace, allowing both your feet and bank account a chance to recover. Keep your list handy and keep an eye out for requested gifts while doing regular shopping.

**Shop smart.** Instead of venturing out to the mall this holiday season, you can be at home shopping online while wearing your PJs and drinking coffee. Online shopping has its own advantages: free shipping promotions, no-hassle returns and often lower prices. Not sure of online shopping? Catalogs and shopping channels offer many of the same conveniences.



*For more help with holiday stress, visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.*



# Family and Holidays

## Yours, Mine and Ours

**For blended families, the holidays can be a stressful and anxious time for parents and children alike.** Feelings of jealousy or discomfort may intrude on hopes and expectations of family happiness. But with communication, understanding and creativity, blended families can overcome these stresses and enjoy the holidays.

### HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

**Be flexible.** Don't insist on celebrating the holiday in a specific way or on a specific day. Compromise and flexibility are essential to a successful celebration. The best time to celebrate is whenever the family can be together.

**Encourage appropriate expressions of feelings.** Listen patiently to one another without interrupting. Maintain open lines of communication so everyone can be heard. Pay special attention to children, who may feel their voices are getting lost in the holiday hubbub.

**Plan ahead.** Discuss holiday plans well in advance to avoid problems or confusion. Encourage family members to share ideas and avoid unrealistic expectations. Try to keep each household's religious practices in mind, especially if they differ, so children can enjoy the best of both worlds.

**Once you have agreed to the plan for the season, follow it.** That will help reduce the amount of tension between the former spouses and give the children a clear schedule to follow so they know what to expect.

**Avoid competition.** Do not compete for time, attention or gifts from children or parents. Remember, the holidays are about spending quality time together, not who can take the children to the most new movies or buy the best presents. Minutes are far more valuable than dollars – use this opportunity to spend some quality time with your children. Gifts are fine, but try to ensure that they are comparable between households and are not used to try to buy the child's loyalty or affection.

**The feeling of competition also needs to extend to the adults themselves.** Stepparents should encourage the relationship between biological parents and children. Biological parents should likewise advocate a positive relationship between children and their stepparents.

**Don't over-commit.** Enjoy as much family time as possible, but plan celebrations that are realistic. Focus on the quality of time spent together. Try to plan activities that are enjoyable for all family members.

**Begin your own traditions.** Realize that your new stepfamily is different from your previous family. Try to establish traditions that capitalize on the uniqueness of your new family. Acknowledge the traditions you or your children may have experienced in years past, then move on to something that is meaningful for you today.

**Don't forget to laugh.** Focus on enjoying yourself and don't be afraid to loosen up. Use humor to defuse stress.

**Be realistic.** Despite good intentions, remember that the holidays do not always turn out as planned. Focus on making them a special time for you and your family, no matter the circumstances. Schedule some time alone for you and your spouse and remember to relax.

The holidays are a magical time for children and one of the best gifts adults can give them is to be civil with each other during this wonderful time of the year.

### HOLIDAY SURVIVAL: KIDS AND THE GIFT OF TIME

Holiday breaks are a great opportunity for parents to spend more quality time with their children. Used wisely, this gift of time can lead to lifelong benefits.

In 2022, 70.3 million people aged 12 or older or 24.9 percent used illicit drugs in the past year according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Marijuana was the most used illicit drug, with 22 percent of people aged 12 or older (or 61.9 million people) using it in the past year.

Research also shows that children with unsupervised time are three times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs. Because school and holiday breaks are a time when more children go unsupervised, it's important to fill these breaks with as much quality time from you as possible.

*For help with family relationships, find resources at [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.*

# Stay Connected With Your Children

Parents should talk to their teens, because the interaction builds open and trusting relationships. The more involved you are in your children's lives, the more valued they feel, and the more likely they will be to respond to you.

By spending valuable time with your children during the holidays, you will not only reconnect, but you will also make memories to be cherished in years to come.

**During the hustle and bustle** of the season, we sometimes forget the joy of spending time and sharing and creating memories with our loved ones. Here are just a few suggestions to help you (re)connect with your children during the holidays:

**15 Minutes.** Spend the first 15 minutes after you or your child arrives home to find out what he or she did that day.

**Food.** Have a sit down meal (breakfast, lunch or dinner) at least four times a week – or as many times as possible.

**Make reservations.** Reserve part of your weekdays and weekends to spend some one-on-one time with each of your children. Older children have their own activities and social obligations, so planning ahead is recommended.

**Holiday classics.** While there may be better ways to spend time with your children than watching television, the holiday season is ripe with TV and movie classics and may offer a shared memory or experience that may help you reconnect with your child. You may also read a classic holiday novel or story, and play a favorite board game – a different one each night.

**Do a holiday project together.** Make holiday cards to send to long-distance family and friends, or make some of the gifts you plan to give together. Homemade holiday cookies or ornaments are often good collaborative projects.

**Reminisce together.** Pull out photos of your past holidays and share memories sparked by the images. Home movies are a good way to teach your children about their relatives.

**Relive a childhood tradition.** With our busy lives and reliance on technology, it's easy to forget the traditions of our childhood and the happy memories that went with them. By reliving those traditions, you are connecting the past with the present and strengthening the bond with your child.

**Share the gift of giving.** Donate new toys to Toys for Tots, pick a child's name off of the Angel Trees found in many stores and churches or plan a holiday meal for a needy family.

*For more family resources, visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org), or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.*





# Santa Claus

## Fact or Fiction?

### Nearly every parent struggles with what to tell children about Santa Claus.

There is no greater joy than seeing the happiness on your pre-schooler's face when he or she exclaims, "Santa came!" Conversely, there may be no greater pressure or guilt than having your 7- or 8-year-old look you in the eye and demand: "Tell me the truth: is Santa real?" School friends may claim Santa doesn't exist, or say Santa won't come if your child stops believing in him.

When that moment arrives – and it will – you might consider establishing the reality of the spirit of Santa Claus with some historic information: In around 300 A.D., Bishop Nicholas in Myra (modern-day Turkey) delivered food, clothing and money under the cloak of darkness so that his needy parishioners would not know the source of these unexpected gifts.

When the customs of Nicholas filtered into Germany, the old saint's name became Nicklaus, and the giving tradition was upheld. Saint Nicklaus was carried to Holland, and in Dutch, became Sinter Klaus. When the Hollanders settled in to New Amsterdam (modern-day New York City) in the 1600s, Santa Claus was born, and the charitable giving continued.

A picture of Santa Claus was provided by Dr. Clement Moore, a professor of Greek and Hebrew at General Theological Seminary in New York, when he penned a short, rhyming composition on Christmas Eve in 1822. The familiar poem starts, "Twas the night before Christmas."

### SO, IS SANTA REAL?

Here's a possible answer: "Santa is mystical, and that means being real, but in a way that you may not be able to see or touch. The real magic of Santa is good feelings that people have when they receive – or give – a surprise, a kindness or a gift. If you decide that Santa isn't just one person, and that he doesn't really fly a



sleigh all the way around the world in one night and deliver toys, that's OK. On Christmas morning, you'll always find something under the tree from someone who loves you very much."

### THE SANTA QUESTIONS

**The mall Santa.** "Is that man at the mall the real Santa?" Say no, he's just a helper dressed in a red suit.

**Reindeer.** Children may ask questions such as, "Do reindeer really fly?" Never lie. Admit you haven't seen a flying reindeer and to your knowledge they don't exist. If the child presses, remind them that it was part of Dr. Moore's poem.

**Santa didn't come.** Children may also ask harder questions, like, "Why do I always get so many toys, and Santa never comes to Molly's house?" That's a tough one. Only you will know if your child is mature enough to understand the spirit of Santa. And if he or she is, you might suggest how your child could be a secret Santa for a needy child.

**Santa and Jesus.** Some children may also be confused about Christmas being Jesus' birthday, but presents coming from Santa Claus. Explain in an age-appropriate way the difference between spiritual observances and cultural customs. For example, Thanksgiving was created to thank God for our country – that's the spiritual side. We also eat turkey with our families and watch football games – that's the cultural side. Tell them that it is fine to celebrate both spiritual and cultural traditions.

When it comes to parenting (or Santa Claus) issues, often there really are no correct answers. Operate from your heart and not your head.

*For more assistance with family relationships, you can find resources at [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.*

# Maintain, Don't Gain

## Are holiday treats worth the weight?

**One of the biggest challenges we have during the holidays is healthy eating.** The average American gains one to two pounds every year from Halloween until New Years Day.

While this doesn't sound like much, the vast majority of people never lose this holiday weight. Therefore if you are the average American, ten years from now you will be 10-20 pounds heavier than you are today.

It's not just holiday meals that cause problems, but also celebrations both at work and in homes, and the treats and snacks many coworkers bring to the office. Even if you know that most of these treats are bad for your cholesterol, blood pressure and waistline, it's hard to turn them down.

### IT'S ESSENTIAL TO HAVE A PLAN OF ACTION TO PREVENT HOLIDAY WEIGHT GAIN:

**Share lighter fare.** Offer to bring a fruit or veggie tray with low-fat dip to family gatherings.

**Try healthier recipes.** Now is the time to try some new heart-healthy recipes for your holiday meal. Many times you can modify your own traditional holiday recipes to make them healthier by making simple ingredient substitutions.

**No food gifts, please.** It's perfectly acceptable to ask family and close friends not to give you food gifts at Christmas.

A wonderful gift for a health-conscious family member is a gift certificate for the Fort Sanders Health and Fitness Center's personal training program. This program is a great way to jump start your weight loss efforts. By working with a personal trainer, you'll have the tools to make the right diet and exercise decisions, and you will feel the difference a healthy and fit lifestyle can make for you. Consider giving the gift of good health to someone you love this year.

For more information on the personal training program please visit the website at [www.fshfc.com](http://www.fshfc.com) or call 865-531-5083.

*For additional information about healthy behaviors and lifestyles, visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.*

**Holiday snacking can wreak havoc on healthy eating. Instead of sweet treats or snacks with rich sauces, try some lighter fare:**

- Celery sticks with peanut butter and raisins
- A handful of dried cranberries and peanuts or almonds
- Fruit slices with caramel sauce or yogurt for dipping

For a more substantial snack, try a high-fiber, high-protein option such as light tuna salad on whole-grain crackers.



# Blue Christmas

## Enjoying the holidays despite sadness, loss or grief

Just because we expect this time of year to be filled with an abundance of joy and good cheer, the season doesn't automatically bring us happy holidays – and it certainly doesn't banish reasons for feeling lonely or sad. In fact, it may increase your likeliness of feeling emotional and negative.

Death, divorce, and even a pandemic can cause a deep and acute sense of loss during the holidays. Relationships, finances and the physical exertion of the season can all play havoc with your life. Learn how to anticipate and circumvent the pitfalls of the holiday blues:

**Reach out.** Spend time with your significant other or a close friend who accepts you as you are. Look for opportunities to socialize and enjoy the company of others.

**Let the past stay in the past.** Don't let perceived past failures get you down. Leave the past where it is and, for that matter, don't worry about the future. Live in the present, especially if thoughts of the past or future cause you sadness, guilt or anxiety.

**Be who you are.** Sometimes when we are with family we tend to fall into preconceived roles. We may be the baby of the family or the fat girl. Keep a sense of who you really are. Don't be brought down by negative comments or the opinions of others, no matter how close they are to you.

**Take care of yourself.** Eat healthy, get plenty of rest, don't drink too much and don't overindulge on sweets and goodies.

**Lighten your heart.** A light holiday book or movie can lift your spirits and give you a break from your to-do list or other holiday stressors.

**Make time to experience the spirit of the season.** Religious services and rituals often bring a sense of peace and purpose to an otherwise frantic time of year.

**Help others.** Sometimes a good response to the blues is to move from self-focused to other-focused. Contribute to a meaningful charity or reach out to help others in a tangible way. Sometimes the gift of your time is as important – or more important – than a gift of money.



During winter months some individuals experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), brought on by decreased exposure to sunlight. Others experience holiday blues that last a few days. But sometimes our feelings go beyond the blues or SAD, and are serious signs of depression. If you or a loved one have holiday blues that seem to be lingering, watch for the following signs:

- Constant sadness or irritability
- Lethargy
- Loss of interest in pleasures once enjoyed
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness
- Changes in weight, appetite or sleeping habits
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Thoughts of suicide or death

If you are aware of any of the above signs or symptoms, seek professional help. A good first step: visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) for information or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.

# Tip: Getting Through Grief

**The loss of someone close to you – whether through death, divorce or other circumstances – can be especially difficult at the holidays.** Here are some tips for those who are experiencing grief during the holiday season or who care about someone who is grieving.

## TO HELP YOURSELF:

**Take care of yourself.** Proper diet, exercise and sleep can go a long way toward helping you deal with stress and achieve a healthy balance in your life.

**Seek others dealing with similar experiences.** You may be able to help others with their problems and they with yours.

**Talk with family members.** Discuss holiday plans, feelings and expectations. Understand that the holidays will not be the same as before. This season might be a time to stop a tradition that makes you sad and replace it with a new one.

**Remember that others are hurting, too.** Whether the vacant chair at the dinner table is empty because of death or divorce, it is likely that others, especially children, are grieving just like you.

## TO HELP OTHERS:

**Keep in touch.** Realize that your grieving friend or family member is coping with an empty spot in his or her life. Phone calls, cards and letters or emails let the person know they are cared about.

**Reassure them.** Grieving people commonly feel guilty for not doing more. Remind them that they did what they could do at the time.

**Be understanding.** Grief may range from sadness to anger. Don't be offended if feelings are taken out on you. In time, the person will feel less devastated or angry.

**Offer help.** A grieving person can feel too overwhelmed to continue with routine chores, or he or she may need someone to take on the tasks that the loved one used to do. Don't wait to be asked – pitch in.

## TO HELP YOURSELF, DON'T:

**Act as if the person never existed.** Acknowledge the person by lighting a special candle, sharing a good memory or making a donation to their favorite charity.

**Try to shop your way into a merry mood.** Shopping may temporarily take your mind off your grief, but running up credit card debt can cause financial struggles and make you feel even more overwhelmed later.

**Act hurt as others wish you a "Happy Hanukkah" or "Merry Christmas."** These greetings are just as natural for some to say as "Happy Birthday" or "Good morning." They don't mean to upset you.

**Feel ashamed.** Whatever you are feeling, it is right for you. Many people benefit from professional group or independent counseling on a temporary basis.

## TO HELP OTHERS, DON'T:

**Avoid the person.** Sometimes your presence is all that is needed. Don't get hung up on doing or saying the right thing.

**Offer irritating cliché advice.** Do not say, "I know how you feel," unless it is true. Also, do not say, "It was for the best." Feelings of grief are acute, and saying these phrases does not help, even if you believe they are true. In cases of a lost child, do not say, "You can have another baby." Each child is unique, and one cannot replace another.

**Pressure someone to stop grieving too soon.** Each person works through grief in his or her own way, on their own time scale – and that's OK. It is unproductive to tell someone it's time to get on with their life, or try to convince the person to let go of a loved one's remembrances if he or she is not ready.

*To find out more about counseling services offered by Peninsula, call 865-970-9800, or visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org).*

# Tip: Is it More Than the Blues?

## When to seek professional help

If five or more of these symptoms persist for more than two weeks or interfere with work and family life, it may be time to seek help through a physician or mental health professional.

- **Feeling sad or empty**
- **A sense a loss of enjoyment or fun**
- **Inexplicable weight gain or loss**
- **Trouble sleeping or sleeping excessively**
- **Feeling restless or slowed down**
- **A lack of energy**
- **Feeling worthless or guilty**
- **Trouble concentrating**
- **Thinking a lot about death**

*If you suspect that you or a loved one is suffering from clinical depression, call Peninsula at 865-970-9800 or visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org).*



# Have a Full Mind

Dr. Mary Nelle Osborne, Ed.D, MA, ATR

As we enter the busy, three month, holiday season we can do so with our 'mind full' or with 'mindfulness.' It seems like time speeds up when Daylight Saving time ends and there is more to plan and do for the holidays! It is not a 'bad thing' that we want to create special memories with families and friends during the holidays. But it is easy to become overwhelmed because we experience "lack": a lack of money, lack of time to shop, cook and get caught up in the 'hype' of commercialism. All of this can increase our stress and crowd out our ability to be fully present in the moments as they come. For those of us with pre-existing mental illnesses the additional stress can increase the symptoms of that diagnosis and increase our vulnerability for crisis. Managing our response to stress becomes paramount to managing our health. One way to improve our resilience and decrease our response to the increased demands is using skills from mindfulness.

The practice of mindfulness is a skill that can help us be more aware and accepting of our present experience, without being distracted or overwhelmed by thoughts and emotions. Mindfulness is not about stopping or denying difficult emotions which are more poignant during the holidays. Rather, practicing mindfulness meditation provides a way to tackle each feeling or problem, one at a time, with calm and with 'presence' of mind. We can acknowledge our feelings of sadness, grief, and loneliness while at the same time finding peace and hope. Choosing to practice mindfulness affords us the opportunity to reset our focus, reduce our stress and tend to our emotional, physical and psychological needs.

Mindfulness is primarily improved through meditation. Practitioners focus on raising awareness of sensations and feelings without interpretation or judgment. The practice of mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery and other practices to relax the body and mind. Meditation has been studied in many clinical trials and the evidence supports the effectiveness of meditation for reducing stress, anxiety, pain, depression, insomnia and high blood pressure. Additionally, meditation has been clinically shown to improve attention, decrease job burnout, improve sleep and improve diabetes control (Mayo Clinic, 2023).

There are simple ways to practice mindfulness to improve attention and restore your body and mind to calm. Try these techniques for a few minutes each day and see how you feel as a result:

1. Pay attention – Set aside a few moments to pay attention to your senses – touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. As you eat a snack or your favorite food, take the time to fully experience its taste and texture. Pay attention to the sunshine or the stars, the coolness of the air on your skin and the smells of the season.
2. Focus on your breathing - Breathe deeply on a three count, hold your breath for three and discharge your breath slowly on a count of three.
3. Negative thoughts – panic, anxiety, sadness, depression, loneliness – as you become aware of these thoughts, practice deepening your breath in your body. Take longer, deeper breaths and imagine waving those negative thoughts and feelings aside. Replace negative thoughts with one positive statement about yourself, i.e., "I am enough". Incorporate this statement as you breathe.
4. Scan your body for tension - Lying on your back or seated in a chair with feet planted on the floor, focus your attention on each part of your body starting at the feet. Be aware of any sensation, tension or emotion as you go and 'breathe' into that area, releasing tension and feeling.
5. Acceptance of Self – Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend; with care and kindness.

Overall, the purpose of mindful meditation is to return attention and awareness to our body and mind with the goal to restore some clarity, calm and peace. Once you have introduced your body and mind to these practices, you can incorporate them in to your daily life in short episodes. Or, you may choose to develop a daily practice, gradually increasing the time you spend in sessions. Over time you might find that mindfulness becomes effortless and is a handy tool to have when you find yourself in a stressful situation that is causing you emotional distress.

If you have a goal of getting through the holidays with less stress and better health, you may want to use some of these techniques to give yourself a restorative break from the hubbub.

# Bah, Humbug!

## Got anger?

### **Anger is a natural and sometimes healthy emotion.**

Unfortunately, if anger is handled the wrong way, it can damage relationships and affect professional and social growth. Learning where your anger comes from and how to deal with it can help lead to a happier, more productive life.

**Understand your anger's origins.** Some people are born with a tendency to be irritable or easily angered. If you have a history of dysfunction or chaos in your family, you are more likely to have anger problems. Society can also be an influence. Anger is often thought of as a negative emotion, so people are not always taught to deal with it effectively.

**Recognize how you display your anger.** Perhaps you isolate yourself or become physically ill. Maybe you have a low tolerance for frustration and can't let things go. Or you may find yourself acting in ways that seem out of control, and your reactions scare those around you.

- Determine what triggers your anger.
- Put yourself in the other person's place. Try to see his or her point of view. If you don't understand it, ask questions until you do.
- Recognize the humor in a situation. Make sure the laugh is on you, not the other person.
- Learn to express displeasure in constructive ways. Instead of saying, "You blew it!" try asking, "How can we fix this?"
- Practice relaxation techniques.
- Walk away. Come back to the situation later, after you've had a chance to cool off.

**Create an action plan.** Here are some tips to help you handle anger more constructively:

- Relax. Breathe deeply, repeat calming words or visualize a relaxing place.
- Use logic. Remember that getting angry is not going to fix things and that much of the stress that you are facing is a part of daily life.
- Cool down. Before dealing with the person who is making you angry, release energy by taking some time by yourself. Try going for a walk.
- Communicate. When having a conflict with another person, listen carefully to the meaning behind what the person is trying to say instead of reacting.
- Be aware. Learn to recognize your triggers. Mentally prepare yourself for a situation that tends to make you angry or try to avoid the situation altogether.

If your anger is severely out of control or has a large impact on everyday life, you may need professional help. Talk with your doctor if you are concerned.



## UNDERSTANDING ANGER

Anger is an emotion that says something is wrong. It can be expressed to tell others about your personal limits, values, rules and boundaries. Learning how to express anger assertively and constructively can improve your personal interaction and your health.

Being angry and expressing it is normal and healthy. However, most people are taught that such expression is unacceptable at an early age. Many people aren't in touch with their anger, or they don't know how to express it. On the other hand, many people express anger indirectly by sulking, being sarcastic, taking revenge or being hostile. The following habits or tendencies also can indicate hidden anger: excessive irritability over little things, chronically stiff or sore neck or shoulder muscles, being overpolite, anxiety attacks, heart palpitations, panic attacks or compulsive overeating, overworking or overexercising.

People who become conscious of their anger, however, can learn how to express it in constructive ways.

Some people express their anger too aggressively, venting their rage, attacking or blaming another person.

# Bah, Humbug!

## Got anger?

### FIRST STEPS

The process of learning to positively express anger can be divided into three parts:

**Recognizing your feelings.** Almost all emotions are connected to some sort of physical reaction. Being aware of your physical reaction when you're angry can help you identify this emotion when you feel it.

**Owning your feelings.** The anger is yours. Another person may have said something or done something that punched your anger button, but the anger is yours and so are the feelings it triggers.

**Responding to your feelings in a better way.** Learning and practicing constructive problem-solving can help you express and manage your anger.

The following strategies will help you approach problems in a controlled, effective manner:

- Make sure you're in a calm state of mind before confronting someone.
- Don't bring up a long list of complaints from the past. Instead, tackle one issue at a time.
- When bringing up or discussing a problem, always focus on the other person's behavior (what he or she is doing or not doing) rather than his or her personality. For example, say, "I would like you to become better at being on time," rather than "You're such an unreliable jerk."
- Be aware of your body language. Maintain eye contact and keep a relaxed and open body posture when talking.
- Speak in a normal tone and at a normal pace. Don't shout, yell or talk too fast or too long.
- If the other person disagrees with you, listen to his or her point of view, then restate what was said.
- Be willing to negotiate a solution. Avoid getting into an "I'm right, you're wrong" battle.
- Be patient with yourself and others.

*For help with dealing with anger or other emotional stress, call Peninsula at 865-970-9800.*





# Painful Secrets

## Self-injury: knowing, understanding, planning

**The teen years can be the most complicated phase of life.** Challenges include school work, changes in relationships and physical changes. For some teens and adults, self-injury becomes an unhealthy coping mechanism for stress and anxiety. If the holidays are more “bah, humbug” than “ho ho ho,” it’s important for someone who self-injures and their caregivers to be aware of personal stressors and develop a plan for dealing with them in a healthy way.

### WHAT IS SELF-INJURY?

When you hurt your body on purpose it is called self-injury. Other names for self-injury are cutting, self-harm or self-mutilation. Some people hurt themselves by cutting, scratching, picking or burning their bodies or embedding foreign objects into their skin.

How do you know if you self-injure? It may seem an odd question to some, but a few people aren’t sure if what they do is truly considered self-injury. Answer these questions:

1. Do you deliberately cause physical harm to yourself to the extent of causing tissue damage, including breaking the skin, bruising or leaving marks that last for more than an hour?
2. Do you cause this harm to yourself as a way of dealing with unpleasant or overwhelming emotions, thoughts or situations?
3. If your self-harm is not compulsive, do you often think about self injury even when you’re relatively calm and not doing it at the moment?

People who self-injure might not feel pain and can do more damage than they mean to. They sometimes hurt themselves repeatedly and often have scars. People who cut themselves often wear long sleeves, even in warm weather.

### WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-INJURE?

People who injure themselves are experiencing overwhelming feelings like extreme anxiety or tension. In the moment, self-injury may seem to provide a feeling of escape or relief. Some people also experience depersonalization, which is when a person doesn’t feel real or feels as if they are outside the body watching himself. People who feel this way might cut or harm

to help them feel real again. Others cut or injure themselves as a way of self-punishment. Many people who self-injure have a history of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and have a sense of shame about themselves.

Most people who self-injure haven’t learned healthier ways to cope with negative feelings. Although you might feel stuck in a pattern of injuring yourself, there is a way out.

### HOW DO I STOP HURTING MYSELF IN THE MOMENT?

It’s important to find ways to soothe or focus yourself when you feel like self-injuring. Make a list of non-harmful things that help you feel relaxed and real, like playing a sport, meditating, drawing or playing an instrument. Keep this list where you can see it so when you feel like hurting yourself you will have other options and you can choose to do something else.

#### Alternate ways to use nervous energy:

- Go for a long walk
- Dance to loud music
- Shoot hoops or kick a soccer ball
- Go jogging
- Clean your room

#### To relax and de-stress:

- Take a bath or hot shower
- Listen to music
- Write in a journal
- Talk to a friend
- Read a good book
- Meditate



# Painful Secrets

## Self-injury: knowing, understanding, planning

**Many people find that keeping busy and spending time with good friends and family helps the most.**

### HOW CAN I RECOVER FROM SELF-INJURY?

Self-injury is a symptom of deeper emotional pain. Getting counseling or psychotherapy can help you better understand your feelings and your life situation. A counselor or therapist can help you figure out why you hurt yourself, what situations put you at risk and what steps you can take to learn healthier ways to deal with intense emotions. If you are also dealing with depression, anxiety or other mental health issues, a therapist can address those, too. Sometimes a healthcare provider may recommend medication as part of your overall plan for recovering from self-injury.

Making the decision to stop self-injuring is a big first step. Learning healthier ways to handle intense feelings will take time. The key to recovering is to get support from people who care about you, and treatment from an experienced therapist or counselor. You deserve this change, so keep working on it. You are not alone in your recovery.

*For more information and help, call Peninsula at 865-970-9800 or visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org).*



### Is self-injury the same as being suicidal?

No, but sometimes injuries can be severe enough to cause death, and sometimes people who self-injure may become suicidal.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal you should get professional help immediately. Tell someone you trust or someone who can help right away. If you cannot find someone to help you or do not know what to do, call 911 or go to the closest hospital emergency room.

*Special note: if you have a cut that is infected or that won't stop bleeding, seek first aid right away.*

*Trained professionals are available 24/7 by calling or texting the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988. You can also chat online with a trained professional at [988lifeline.org](http://988lifeline.org).*



# Joyful Recovery

An ongoing process, 24/7, 365 days a year

**Throughout his teens and early 20s Ryan used alcohol and prescription drugs to deal with the stresses of everyday life.** After hospitalizing a relative and a stint in jail, he got clean and sober.

Nine years later, Ryan is committed to his sobriety and has learned to deal with stress in a healthy way. He admits that the holidays are hard for him, but not just because of the parties and festivities. Ryan is an only child of parents who divorced just a few years ago.

Ryan points out that whether you are newly sober or have 10, 20 or 30 years of sobriety, addiction is a disease fought on a daily basis. He believes in having a plan when attending parties, festivities or gatherings where temptations and stress can act as triggers.

Peninsula experts agree and offer these tips for resisting certain things during social or family events:

**Parties.** Parties are part of the holiday tradition. Many parties involve the use of alcohol and sometimes other recreational substances. People in recovery should carefully plan for situations where they may become uncomfortable. You may also seek out sober celebrations hosted by NA/AA or other sober community support groups. During this time NA/AA are offering many groups/services virtually to assist those in need.

**Beverages.** If you are unsure whether non-alcoholic beverages will be served, bring your own. Once the beverage is in your glass, chances are others will not know that you have only soda.

**Location.** Choose an area of the room away from the bar to hang out. This may feel odd to those who are new to sobriety, but the payoff is worth it.

**Stay busy.** Dance, eat, talk to other guests or offer to help the host.

**Be prepared.** Go to parties prepared to outsmart your disease. When someone says, "Would you like a drink?" you do not owe explanations. Either reply "No, thank you," or "Yes, a non-alcoholic drink would hit the spot right now."

**Leave early.** If you feel that you will not be able to resist the temptation to drink, leave. Call someone who supports you and helps keep you sober one day at a time. Have your sponsor, clergyman, counselor or best friend's number on speed dial.

If you need help with alcohol or other addiction problems, Peninsula offers confidential counseling services that will help you get back in control while you continue your daily routine of work and family responsibilities.

Experts know that not all people with a drinking problem are able to take that first step toward recovery themselves. That's why the intervention of friends and family members is so important.

*Get involved if you know someone who may need help. Visit [www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://www.peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) or call Peninsula at 865-970-9800 for help with recovery, or information about how you can assist a loved one.*



# Support

## When you need more than family and friends

**The added stress of the holidays can be daunting, especially for those who already are dealing with their own or another person's depression, anxiety, chemical dependency, other medical conditions or loss of a loved one.** That's why a strong support system can be an important resource for recovery and empowerment.

While friends and family can provide strength and support for many people, it may be helpful to turn to others outside your immediate circle. Support groups bring together people with similar problems to share emotional problems and provide moral support.

Peninsula Lighthouse offers outpatient groups for people who have psychological, behavioral and/or alcohol and drug problems, and those with loved ones who have addiction or psychological problems.

**All support groups meet at the Peninsula Lighthouse campus at 1451 Dowell Springs Blvd. in West Knoxville. Call 865-970-9800 for directions.**

### Peninsula Lighthouse Outpatient Groups

*Peninsula accepts most insurance plans and participates in the TN Dept of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Behavioral Health Safety Net.*

**Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training Group:** Skills training to combat negative thinking – typically 6 months duration.

**Circle of Friends:** For special needs adults (psychotic disorders interfering with ability to function in typical group setting, mild spectrum autism, & developmental disabilities.) 18 and older.

**Bridges Group:** For individuals focusing on problem solving in early recovery from substance use.

**Women's Only Group:** Any female with diagnostic issues can attend and all insurances accepted.

**Recovery Education Center (Psychosocial Rehab):** An educational program that assists individuals in developing an understanding of their mental illness and building skills to improve social functioning in order to prepare you for success in reaching your life goals. (TNCare and Safety Net only).

### Free Support Groups Open to the Public

**Peer Support Academy:** Education as well as recovery and social support is offered by staff who are certified as Peers by the state of Tennessee. Peers are individuals with lived experience of mental illness and/or substance abuse. This is a grant-funded program, no fees or insurance required, open to residents of Blount, Knox, Sevier and Loudon Counties.

**ComPass Group (Communicating the Pain as Suicide Survivors):** a safe place of support, understanding, and education during the journey of loss following the suicide death of a loved one. This group is open/ongoing for those who have lost a family member, friend, or co-worker to suicide. Not appropriate for observers or those who have survived a suicide attempt. 2nd Tuesday of each month, 6 -p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

**Call 865-970-9800 or visit [peninsulabehavioralhealth.org](http://peninsulabehavioralhealth.org) for more details.**



  
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