

Holiday burnout: Why it happens and three research-proven ways to help you recover

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The constant stress of the holidays can leave some people feeling burnt-out when they're over. Credit: Iлона Kozhevnikova/ Shutterstock

Although Christmas only lasts a few days each year, many of us spend months planning for it. But as enjoyable as all the parties and festivities might be, many people find they feel a bit burnt-out once the holidays have come and gone. This feeling has even been termed "festive burnout" or "holiday burnout." Here's why this happens—and what you can do to recover after the holidays are over.

Many of us are exposed to numerous stressors over a very short period of time throughout the holiday season—whether it's queuing for presents, sitting in traffic on the way to visit friends or family, worrying about money or even the stress of seeing family.

As soon as your brain perceives a stressor, it ignites your sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the body's "fight or flight" reaction. It does this to prepare your body to stay alert and get you through a [stressful situation](#).

When the [sympathetic nervous system is activated](#), the body produces adrenaline and begins working harder—with more blood being pumped through the heart, the lungs increasing their air intake, and eyesight and hearing being enhanced. You may experience these changes as feeling more sweaty or having a pounding chest.

But as we face up against repeated stressors during the [holidays](#), this can lead to lasting changes within the body systems connected to this [stress response](#)—ultimately leaving you feeling [burnt-out](#).

Specifically, it can make the sympathetic nervous system more prone to activation and dampen the effects of the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps your body balance out stress responses. Add to that the increased production of cortisol, a hormone essential in controlling your [energy levels](#), and you may find it difficult to sleep at night, become irritated for no reason, or feel over-excited and [unable to relax](#).

At the same time, when your cortisol activation lasts too long because of a cascade of small stressful events leading up to Christmas, your body may start producing lower daily cortisol levels, leaving it [feeling drained](#). Eventually, the constant activation of the [sympathetic nervous system](#) inhibits your body's ability to recover from stress and feel energized throughout the day, contributing to feelings of festive [burnout](#).

If you're finding you feel burnt-out after the holidays, here are a few things you can do to feel better and recover.

1. [Reminiscence](#)

One way to reduce the negative impact of stress is to experience [positive emotions](#). Reminiscing can also help you get a [new perspective](#) on your experiences, which helps you see your life in a more balanced way.

You can do this activity on your own or, better yet, with your loved ones. Reminisce about the good times using prompts such as photographs. Discuss them with family and friends. If you're on your own, close your eyes and think about your memories carefully, or write them down. The more effort you put into this activity, the better your results.

Trying to re-experience the [positive emotions](#) you had during the holiday season will help [remind your body](#) what it feels like to feel good.

2. [Listen to music](#)

If you find it difficult to relax, have difficulty sleeping or feel tired even after sleeping for many hours following the [holiday season](#), try bringing more music into your life. This is especially important [before you go to sleep](#). Music is associated with [stress reduction](#), and reducing stress will help ease symptoms of burnout.

It can be any music you like, so long as it does actually [make you feel better](#). If you want to maximize the positive effect of [music](#), listen to it throughout the day or try [dancing to it](#)—either on your own or with loved ones.

3. [Anticipate a good day](#)

For the next week, before going to bed, try to vividly imagine four positive events that could happen to you the next day. They might be as simple as receiving a text from someone you care about, going for a walk, or doing one of your favorite things.

Try to use all your senses when imagining this—then as soon as you are ready, go to bed. This technique will help you get a [good night's sleep](#)—and sleep is important for helping you to rebuild all your depleted resources and recover from burnout after the [festive season](#).

Although Christmas can certainly be a stressful time for many of us, remembering why we choose to celebrate with friends and family can help us to overcome any stress and burnout that we may now be experiencing.

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