

HOLIDAY THRIVE GUIDE

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6 TIPS FOR MANAGING  
HOLIDAY LONELINESS

THE HEALTH BENEFITS  
OF GRATITUDE

HOW TO KEEP THE PEACE  
THIS SEASON

THANK YOU, FROM YOUR  
PARTNER IN HEALTH





A woman with long brown hair is looking down, her hand resting near her face in a contemplative or sad pose. The background is dark with out-of-focus, colorful lights in shades of red, green, and blue, suggesting a festive or holiday setting. The entire image is framed within a circular shape.

# TIPS FOR MANAGING HOLIDAY LONELINESS

Edited by Mary Polychronas, Psychologist,  
Medisys Health Group

The holiday season is often synonymous with spending extra time with friends, family and coworkers – but it can also trigger feelings of loneliness.

Whether it's grieving the loss of a loved one, overcoming a breakup, coping with financial stress or just feeling disconnected, the "holiday blues" are so common they have their own name. Common, however, doesn't mean normal.

The American Psychological Association says that chronic feelings of loneliness can be a cause for concern. Loneliness can have a devastating impact on one's long-term psychological and physical health – it can predispose individuals to depression, Alzheimer's disease, suppressed immune function, stress on the cardiovascular system and even affect longevity<sup>1</sup>.

Make it a priority to practice self-care strategies like these, which can help manage loneliness during the holidays:

## 1. MAINTAIN REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

The holiday hype is everywhere: movies, songs and advertisements are all about happy couples and families enjoying this wonderful time of the year. But unrealistic expectations can end in disappointment, and life doesn't always measure up to movie standards. Use past experiences to draw boundaries that avoid rekindling painful memories or unhealthy patterns of behaviour. Try not to focus on the absence of a romantic partner or close family members, and pay attention to what – and who – you do have instead. You'll likely realize that you're less alone than you think.

## 2. GET INVOLVED

While finding the energy to reach out during a difficult time can be hard, research shows that the most powerful tool against loneliness is connection.

The positive effects of social interactions offer a plethora of health benefits<sup>2</sup>. If you are suffering from seasonal loneliness, try not to isolate yourself – instead, reach out! Search for local clubs, meetups and events. Ask local community centres or religious institutions about volunteer opportunities. Meet with friends, family or neighbours or organize an event of your own. Above all, let the people around you know that you need their support during this difficult time.

## 3. PRACTICE GRATITUDE AND GIVE BACK TO SOMEONE LESS FORTUNATE

Social actions that facilitate a connection with others generate a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being. Therefore, if you are struggling with seasonal loneliness, try to focus on the things you have to be grateful for instead

of what is missing. Think of positive ways you can help others that may have less than you too. In the process, you may find that the love and light you give to others will actually nourish your own soul!

## 4. SPEND QUALITY TIME WITH YOURSELF

It's important to remember that spending the holidays alone does not necessarily mean feeling lonely. In fact, having time off from everyday responsibilities can be a great opportunity to indulge in some special activities or treats. Try ordering in or making a special meal, watching movies, taking a bath or journaling. Check out local libraries, galleries, museums or cinemas – many have special exhibits or concerts during the holiday season. Give yourself permission to enjoy your own company, and take time to process your emotions.

## 5. STAY ACTIVE

The positive psychological and physiological effects of regular exercise are well-documented<sup>3</sup>, and research indicates that even modest amounts of exercise can make a difference. Exercise releases feel-good chemicals that counteract the negative effects of loneliness, and group fitness classes or sports teams can lead to new relationships too. According to Harvard Health<sup>4</sup>, sunlight increases happiness, and the vitamin D boost helps fight depression and cancer – so there are several good reasons to meet a friend and go for a winter walk!

## 6. LIMIT TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA

While Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media sites may promise to connect us to our friends, a study<sup>5</sup> from the University of Pennsylvania reports that there is a strong correlation between social media use and self-reported levels of loneliness. According to the study, decreasing the amount of time spent on social media platforms resulted in lower rates of depression, anxiety and loneliness. Around the holidays, navigating the online world can be especially hard when profiles are inevitably filled with posts about family gatherings and significant others. To avoid being exposed to something that will trigger feelings of loneliness, try to limit the amount of time you spend online.

Loneliness is hard to cope with at any time of the year, but it can be especially difficult during the holidays with the added pressure and societal expectations. It's ok to not be ok, but if your feelings of loneliness last more than a few weeks, or if you start being overwhelmed and significantly challenged by daily life, you may consider reaching out to a professional. For immediate help, use your virtual care platform. Medisys On-Demand healthcare professionals remain available 24/7, even during the holidays. [\*\*Click here\*\*](#) to learn more.

### Sources:

1 <https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2017/09/loneliness-sick> 2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/> 3 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20048389> 4 [https://www.health.harvard.edu/press\\_releases/spending-time-outdoors-is-good-for-you](https://www.health.harvard.edu/press_releases/spending-time-outdoors-is-good-for-you) 5 [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jordyn\\_Young2/publication/328838624\\_No\\_More\\_FOMO\\_Limiting\\_Social\\_Media\\_Decreases\\_Loneliness\\_and\\_Depression/links/5be5a5cb299bf1124fc63279/No-More-FOMO-Limiting-Social-Media-Decreases-Loneliness-and-Depression.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jordyn_Young2/publication/328838624_No_More_FOMO_Limiting_Social_Media_Decreases_Loneliness_and_Depression/links/5be5a5cb299bf1124fc63279/No-More-FOMO-Limiting-Social-Media-Decreases-Loneliness-and-Depression.pdf)



# THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF GRATITUDE

By Andrea Stokes, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Health Group





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The simple task of acknowledging what we have to be grateful for offers a surprising number of health benefits, but it doesn't come naturally to all of us. It's important to make a conscious decision to incorporate a gratitude practice into our daily lives.

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## WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF GRATITUDE? HOW DOES IT WORK?

- **Gratitude improves physical health:** In general, grateful people report fewer aches and pains and greater overall health than others. They are also more likely to have lifestyle habits that promote good health, such as exercising regularly and attending health check-ups more often.

- **Gratitude improves mental health:** Being grateful can help replace negative emotions that so easily find their way into our daily thoughts. Anger, resentment, frustration, sadness and stress can all be minimized when we shift our perspective toward the positive.

- **Gratitude enhances empathy and improves social connections:** Grateful people tend to treat others with kindness, even when they aren't receiving the same in return. Instead of responding with aggression, they are better able to empathize and keep their cool, which can have a domino effect on everyone they interact with. Grateful people also tend to attract a wider social circle, which can have significant impacts on psychological wellbeing.

- **Gratitude improves sleep:** Studies have shown that individuals who take a few moments to jot down things for which they are grateful before going to bed tend to sleep better and for longer. Plus, it will never hurt to end your day on a positive note!

- **Gratitude improves self-esteem:** Constantly comparing yourself to others can leave you feeling jealous, anxious and less satisfied with your own life. Practicing gratitude for what you are able to do/afford/experience makes what others are doing less important to your overall sense of wellbeing.

While there is a clear connection between gratitude and healthier, happier people, the mechanisms behind how gratitude helps physical health are not totally clear. It does seem that grateful people are inspired to live healthier lifestyles – not smoking, eating well and exercising more often. Improvements to sleep could certainly play a role, as could the stress-buffering effect of counting our blessings. The social connections fostered through gratitude can also pave the way for long-lasting health improvements. While the explanation might be up for debate, the benefits of gratitude are varied and well worth the moment or two it takes to think about all we have to be grateful for each day.

## START TODAY

Start a gratitude journal and make note of three specific things every day for which you are grateful. Reap extra benefits by making your list as you go to bed. Keep a paper copy, start a note in your smartphone or just make a mental note if you'd like to keep it private. Boost your workplace wellness by installing a Wall of Gratitude and encourage co-workers to leave sticky notes throughout the week outlining what makes them feel grateful. It could be as simple as a sunny day or a hot cup of coffee!

## TURN NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES

Practicing gratitude can be a great way to make every day activities seem like blessings. For example, when you're feeling like exercise is a chore, think about how grateful you are to be in good health and able to exercise, as not everyone has that luxury. Or when you're feeling stressed about making dinner, consider how lucky you are to have healthy food in the fridge and friends and family to enjoy a meal with. When we appreciate the mundanities of life, we end up with endless reasons to be happy.



# HOW TO KEEP THE **PEACE** THIS SEASON

Edited by Mary Polychronas, Psychologist, Medisys Health Group

As a child, the holidays are magical – the lights, the songs, the warmth of your family around you. But as an adult, it can feel like the magic has morphed into frenzy, noise, and Uncle Frank telling you how to live your life and raise your kids.

The good news is, that childhood cheer doesn't have to disappear. With the right tools to preserve your wellbeing and navigate potential family conflicts, you can recapture that warmth and enjoy the season to the fullest.

**Here are four strategies for keeping the peace during the holidays:**

## 1. MAINTAIN YOUR SELF-CARE ROUTINE

It's easy to lose yourself in the demands of the holiday season, especially if you're playing host to the whole family. When that happens, self-care is one of the first things to fall by the wayside, and things that don't usually bother you start to get under your skin. So before you start planning holiday get-togethers, make sure you've set aside time and space to properly take care of yourself even when hosting. Make a plan to:

- Maintain a good sleep schedule
- Keep up with an exercise routine, even if it's simply a daily walk
- Set aside some time each day to relax

Once you've made sure those basics are covered, continue listening to your own needs throughout the season. Being aware of what you need and making sure you are mentally and physically rested will equip you to better take care of others.

## 2. LOWER CONSUMPTION

When conflict and stress start bubbling up, many turn to food and drink to calm their frayed nerves. While that may work in the short term, excessive drinking and eating will only make you feel worse and increase anxiety in the long term.

While people often turn to alcohol to reduce stress, it actually increases anxiety and decreases self-control. Anxiety Canada notes that "the more you drink, the more alcohol affects the brain, and negative emotions can start to take over."

Try decreasing the amount of alcohol available at your gatherings. Instead of bottles of wine or liquor, plan for low

or alcohol-free punches, eggnogs and ciders that are equally festive and delicious.

When it comes to food, overeating is often viewed as an integral part of the holidays, but it can cause problems beyond seasonal weight gain.

Overeating also causes spikes in blood sugar, followed by lows that increase fatigue and slow down brain activity – especially if the meal is full of empty calories from refined sugars and carbohydrates. Shifts in blood sugar are known to cause mood swings too, resulting in irritability, aggression, nervousness and lack of focus – all of which can exacerbate friction, stress and conflict.

By offering lighter, healthier dishes along with traditional comfort foods, you not only take care of your loved ones' hunger, but also foster harmony at the family table.

## 3. PREPARE FOR DISAGREEMENTS

Gathering a group of people who may only see each other once a year is bound to cause a few disagreements. Prepare for conflict beforehand by:

- Planning seating arrangements carefully
- Preparing something to say to distract from hot-button topics
- Offering lighthearted games to keep people busy
- Learning how to de-escalate conflicts

## 4. MAINTAIN RESPECT

When tempers flare, attacks on opinions can become very personal. It's important to view each guest and family member as a whole person with individual hopes and dreams, fears and frustrations. Aim not to change who they are or attack their beliefs, but to find out why they think and feel the way they do. Then, everyone can feel like they are being heard and respected.

Despite your best efforts, sometimes conflicts happen. If you continue to feel down as a result, or for other reasons during the holiday season, use Medisys On-Demand to instantly connect with a healthcare professional from the comfort of your home, any time of day. [\*\*Click here\*\*](#) to learn more.





# THANK YOU, FROM YOUR PARTNER IN HEALTH

As another year draws to a close, we want to express our deepest gratitude for trusting us with your most vital assets – your health, and the health of your employees and loved ones.

The Medisys standard of care remains, while innovation is at the heart of everything we do. We are always looking for ways to leverage new services and technologies to optimize the quality and delivery of healthcare to Canadians, and this is truer now than ever.

Our recent coming together with TELUS Health is a demonstration of the value of healthcare technology meeting high-end service. In the last year, we grew our service offering by launching Precision Health by Medisys with Nutrigenomix, a genetic counselling service for an unparalleled level of proactive healthcare, and a virtual care delivery platform, Medisys On-Demand.

Thousands of you have shown your appetite for this exciting and convenient new healthcare model. Rest assured that we will continue to enhance our virtual care offering in 2020 with more in-depth virtual mental health therapy and coaching, as well as mental health analysis tools for employers to better understand their workforce resilience.



As Canada's leading national provider of comprehensive, preventive and corporate healthcare solutions, our goal continues to be: *Deliver the best possible healthcare while providing an unhurried, personalized and patient-centred experience.*

We are dedicated to supporting your health at work, at home and abroad – from welcoming you into our clinics to connecting with you instantly while you're on the go.

On behalf of our 500 healthcare professionals, as well as all of our team members, we thank you.

It is the greatest privilege of our careers to be your partner in health.

**"Hearing feedback from you about how we're helping you stay on top of your health is inspiring, so thank you for taking the time to let us know how we are doing. I know you are in the very best hands with our medical team, and now having on-demand access to that care, through our industry-leading virtual care platform, Medisys On-Demand, is an incredible evolution."**



– Terry Power, CEO, Medisys Health Group

**"Becoming a partner in my patients' health is both a joy and a special honour. I often follow patients for years, supporting them during their most meaningful chapters and challenges in life. It is both a personal and a professional privilege to share this healthcare journey and I am grateful."**



– Dr. Vivien Brown, Vice President Medical Affairs, Medisys Health Group

**"It is customary during the holiday season, to reflect on the perspectives of the past year and the prospects of the coming one. Wishing you the joy of family, the gift of friends, the benefits of good health and all the best for 2020. We are grateful for your loyalty and patronage with our care and services."**



– Dr. Howard Goldstein, Corporate Medical Director, Medisys Executive Health

**"When I see my clients evolve and start to thrive in their new lifestyle, there's no better reward. Even when they misstep and fall off their wellness path from time to time, they know I'm here to help guide them back. It's a journey we're on together and I feel so grateful and privileged to be able to support them."**



– Lily Elizabeth Lam, Registered Dietitian, Medisys

**"It's a privilege to be able to guide and motivate people on the healthy lifestyle they're about to embark on. To see them evolve and enjoying this new lifestyle is very rewarding. I'm very grateful to be part of a team who can make a difference for people."**



– Melissa Morisseau, Kinesiologist, Medisys

**"Getting to know our patients and be able to listen to their personal stories is one of the best parts of my job. Earning their trust, and helping to support them in a meaningful way - even just to help them get through a fear of needles- is really what it's all about. Healthcare and great medicine isn't just about treating the illness, it's about being present in each interaction and in every relationship I build."**



– Julie Cowan, Registered Nurse and Associate Director, Medisys Toronto

We wish you a holiday season full of laughter, love, joy and of course – good health –alongside the people you cherish most. We can't wait to see you in the new year!

We love hearing your health success stories! Want to share an update about your own health and/or employee wellness initiatives? Contact us at [marketing@medisys.ca](mailto:marketing@medisys.ca) and be featured on our blog, in our newsletter or on our social media channels!



The holiday season is a busy time! Join our 12 Days of Wellness e-campaign and receive daily tips that will help you:

- Improve your mindfulness
- Budget and shop without breaking the bank
- Make healthy food choices
- Stay in shape during the holidays
- And more!

**JOIN THE E-CAMPAIGN**



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