How easy is it for us to conjure up an idyllic image of the holiday season? Perhaps we picture ourselves opening up perfectly wrapped presents in front of a roaring fire with our well mannered family. Oh the pressure that comes from trying to create this scene!

Many people deal with holiday blues during this season. You might feel an increase in anxiety or irritability when trying to figure out a way to deal with all the demands on your time. Unrealistic expectations might also contribute to the holiday blues as you might feel that even your best won’t be good enough. It’s important to think about the experience that you want to have during the holidays and to work towards that goal. Is it more important to you that you enjoy yourself or that your house is immaculate? Re-adjust your expectations so that they are realistic and doable.

Becoming aware of some of the common triggers of holiday stress and depression allows us to plan ahead and avoid some of these pitfalls. The following are three of the most common stressors that you might be faced with.

**Relationships**
Relationships can be stressful any time of the year, but the holidays might lead to increased tensions. Tensions may rise as couples try to negotiate whose family they will spend time with or make decisions regarding how they will celebrate the holidays. The holidays are usually met with a time of family togetherness that might not happen at any other time during the year. Family conflicts and misunderstandings are bound to occur as you try to merge many different personalities while trying to negotiate everyone’s individual needs. The holidays might also highlight the absence of a loved one resulting in a feeling of intense loneliness or sadness. Be kind to yourself! Know that you won’t be able to please everyone or mediate all of the misunderstandings. It’s not your responsibility to become the Holiday Superhero.

**Finances**
Overspending during this time of year is also common. There are gifts to buy and travel plans to make. Finances might be pushed to the limit as you try to make ends meet while also attempting to make everyone happy. Again, it’s important to know your limits and keep your expectations realistic.

**Physical Demands**
Your to-do list has no doubt grown increasingly long and your social calendar has probably filled up. Trying to juggle all of these responsibilities has probably put your self care on the back burner. You might be overindulging in rich foods and not finding the time to exercise. When your body is run down it makes coping with stress that much more difficult. Prioritize your physical and emotional health. You’ll get more done and feel better while doing it.

Keeping your expectations realistic and prioritizing your own needs is especially important at the holidays, but can also be helpful to you throughout the year as you tackle the inevitable stressors that will come your way.
Surviving Holiday Stress and Depression!

Use these tips to help you and your family deal with the holiday:

- Take care of yourself.
- Be realistic with expectations.
- Re-evaluate unnecessary pressure.
- Stick to a budget.
- Plan ahead.
- Recognize your feelings.
- Keep healthy habits (i.e., eating, drinking, exercise).
- Seek support from family or friends or talk with a professional.

Stress-Free Sugared Cranberries

This quick and easy dessert takes only a few minutes to put together. The contrast between the tart cranberries and sugary coating makes the flavor pop in your mouth. Best of all, they are super-easy to make!

Servings: 9 servings of 1/3 cup  Preparation time: 10 minutes and then 1/2 day or 8 hours in refrigerator

Ingredients:

- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 cups water
- 2 cups fresh cranberries
- 3/4 cups superfine sugar

Directions:

Combine granulated sugar and water in small saucepan over low heat, stir mixture until sugar dissolves. Bring to a simmer; remove from heat. (Do not boil or the cranberries may pop when added.) Stir in cranberries; pour mixture into bowl. Cover and refrigerate 8 hours or overnight. Drain cranberries in a colander over a bowl, reserving steeping liquid, if desired. Place superfine sugar in a shallow dish (if you can’t find superfine sugar, make your own by processing granulated sugar in a food processor for a minute). Add the cranberries in a single layer on a baking sheet; let stand at room temperature 1 hour (or until dry). Note: The steeping liquid clings to the berries and helps the sugar adhere. Store in an airtight container in a cool place for up to a week.