

SmartHealth holiday season guide

Navigate the complexities of the season
with a gentle approach that respects your
journey and supports your well-being.



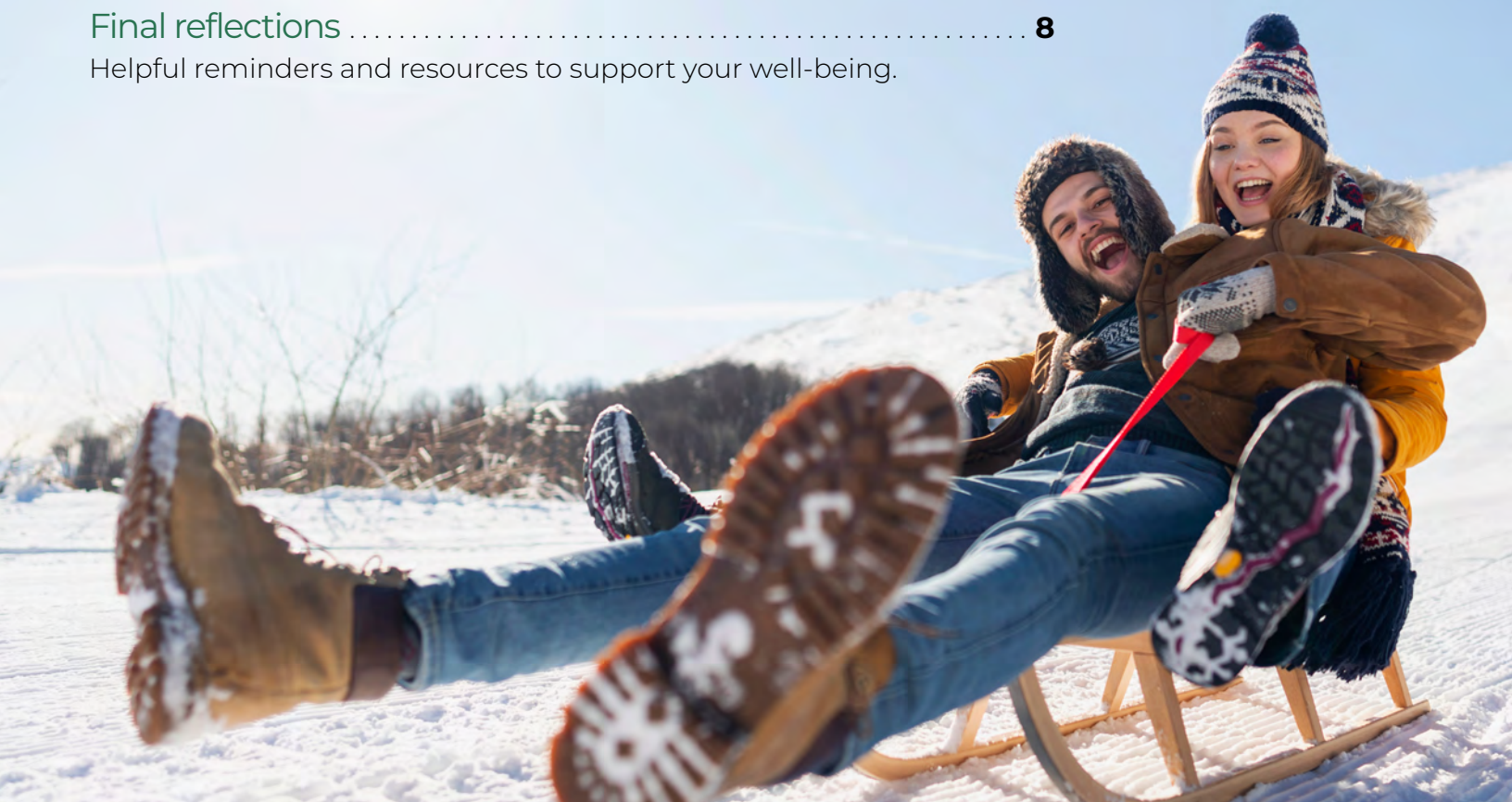
Holding space for the holidays

The holiday season is often known as a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness. But for many, it can also bring feelings of stress, grief, loneliness, or pressure. These experiences may be obvious or quietly felt, and they are all valid.

Whether you love this time of year or simply try to get through it, this guide is here to support you with compassion, clarity, and care. We all experience the season differently and that's okay!

In this guide, we'll explore:

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Reframing the gift

The holiday season can often come with a lot of pressure to spend. Gifts, decorations, meals, travel—it all adds up quickly. It's easy to get caught up in the feeling that spending more means showing more love or being a better friend or family member. But what if we shifted that thinking? What if the heart of the holidays isn't about the dollar amount, but about the connection, care, and time we share?

Tips to lighten the financial load:

- Create a budget that feels doable for you and stick to it.
- Talk honestly with your loved ones about limits. Include what you can and can't do this year.
- Gifts don't have to be fancy or expensive. A heartfelt note, a home-cooked meal, or something handmade can mean the world. Thoughtfulness always wins.
- It's okay to say no to gift exchanges or traditions that leave you feeling stretched too thin.

Take a moment to reflect:

What does “giving” mean to you this holiday season? Jot down one small thing you can do this year that feels thoughtful without adding stress.

Need a little extra support?

SmartHealth is here for you. Whether you're looking for helpful tips, practical tools, or someone to talk to, it's a resource you can use to help navigate the holidays with ease.

SOURCE

[America Saves: “How Financial Wellness Supports Your Mental Wellbeing”](#)
Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO MS | August 2025

Honoring grief in all its forms through the season

The holidays are often portrayed as joyful and full of togetherness, but when you're carrying grief, this season can feel especially tender. Grief doesn't follow the calendar, and you might feel expected to celebrate while your heart feels heavy. Traditions, music, even familiar scents can stir up memories of who or what's missing and suddenly the "most wonderful time of year" feels more like something you have to endure.

You're not alone in that. And you don't need to pretend you're feeling festive if you're not.

Let's explore some gentle ways to cope:

- Light a candle or set a place at the table to honor someone you're missing.
- Talk about them. Share a story, a photo, or even a recipe that reminds you of them.
- Start a small ritual that brings comfort. You can write them a letter, take a walk where you feel close to them, or donate in their memory.
- Give yourself permission to change things up this year. Traditions can bend or even pause for healing.
- Take care of your body and mind: rest when you need to, eat nourishing meals, move gently, and allow yourself healthy distractions.
- Set realistic expectations for yourself. It's okay to do less.

Grief is a process, and it's okay to be sad. Try to focus on what you need in the present moment and take things one day at a time. There is no wrong way to grieve, there is only your way.

Science-based reframe:

Research shows that finding ways to maintain a connection with someone you've lost can be a healthy part of grieving. It's okay to talk to them, include their name in conversation, or hold onto objects that remind you of them.

Support is there when you need it

If it feels heavy, don't carry it alone. Talk to someone you trust or connect with a support group or grief counselor who can help.

SOURCES

[Hope Haven: "Navigating Grief During the Holidays"](#)

[Good Grief: "5 Tips for Continuing Bonds with People We've Lost"](#)

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO MS | August 2025





A season for everyone

The holiday season means many things to many people, and not everyone celebrates in the same way. Different cultures, religions, and personal beliefs shape how or if this time is observed. For some, the holidays are full of joy and tradition. For others, it might be a time of reflection, or simply another day on the calendar.

Ways to honor differences:

- **Welcome inclusive spaces:** Whether at home, work, or social gatherings, try to make spaces welcoming for all traditions and backgrounds. This could mean decorating in ways that reflect a mix of cultures or being mindful of the music and food you share.
- **Use neutral language:** “Happy Holidays” or “Season’s Greetings” is appreciated instead of assuming everyone celebrates the same way.
- **Learn and celebrate:** Take the opportunity to learn about holidays and traditions different from your own. Maybe attend a community event, watch a documentary, or read a book. Celebrating diversity can expand your understanding and appreciation.
- **Reflect:** What does this season mean to you personally? Beyond the noise and expectations, give yourself permission to define it your own way.

Did you know?

There are over 400 holidays celebrated worldwide between November and January. From Diwali and Hanukkah to Kwanzaa and Christmas, and many others, the season is rich with diverse meanings.

Want to learn more?

Explore [diverse holiday traditions and find tips](#) for inclusive celebrations.

SOURCE

[Diversity Resources: “Diversity Calendar 2025”](#)

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO MS | August 2025



‘Tis the season to protect your peace

Family gatherings can be full of laughter, tradition, and connection. But sometimes they can also stir up tension, pressure, or past pain. And for some, family doesn't look like a holiday card snapshot. Maybe you're navigating estrangement, grief, strained relationships, or even choosing not to engage with family at all. Wherever you land, your experience is valid.

Choose your calm

You don't have to say yes to everything or everyone. Whether it's skipping an event, stepping away from uncomfortable conversations, or simply needing space, you get to choose what supports your mental and emotional well-being.

Boundaries are necessary, not unkind

Setting boundaries isn't about pushing people away, it's about creating space for your peace. And peace is worth protecting. Keep these phrases on deck:

- "I'd rather not get into that right now."
- "Let's agree to disagree and enjoy the day."
- "I need to take a quick breather, be right back."
- "I'm sitting this one out, but I hope you all have a nice time."

Family looks different for everyone

Family can take many forms. What matters most is being with people who make you feel safe, seen, and supported, whether that's biological family or chosen family. Your holiday doesn't have to look a certain way. What counts is how it feels to you.

Less pressure, more joy

The holidays can come with a lot of "shoulds," tempting us to chase picture-perfect moments and show-stopping gifts. Try flipping those expectations and give yourself permission to let go of perfection. Focus on what feels manageable and meaningful to you.

SOURCE

[Mental Health America: "Hope For The Holidays"](#)

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO MS | August 2025

Wrap yourself in kindness

The holidays often shift how we care for ourselves, how we eat, move, sleep, and rest, and that's completely normal. Whether you're feeling overwhelmed or simply trying to find balance, remember this: your body deserves gentle kindness and thoughtful self-care.

Feeling disconnected from your body?

Try checking in with yourself throughout the day. Are you hungry? Tired? In need of a walk or a nap? Listening to your body's signals can help you stay grounded.

Gentle ways to support your body:

- **Start your day with something nourishing.** A balanced breakfast that includes protein sources, whole grains, fruits/vegetables, and healthy fats can help you feel steady and satisfied.
- **Drink water throughout the day.** Keeping a reusable water bottle nearby is an easy way to stay on top of hydration.
- **Make a comfort kit for busy days.** Whether it's a warm drink, a soft blanket, a favorite playlist, or a moment of quiet, small comforts can make a big difference.
- **Turn everyday routines into self-care rituals.** Let your shower become a moment to reset. Feel the water wash away tension, rinsing off stress.

Need a little extra self-care support?

[SmartHealth](#) is here for you. Whether you're looking for helpful tips, practical tools, or someone to talk to, it's a resource you can use to help navigate the holidays with ease.

SOURCES

[The Jed Foundation: "Self-Care for the Holidays"](#)

[Global Self-Care Federation: "What is self-care?"](#)

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Create your anchor

The holidays often shake up our usual rhythms; late nights, full calendars, travel, and more social time than usual. While much of it can be fun, it can also leave you feeling off-balance or drained. Holding onto just a few grounding routines can help you stay connected to yourself in the midst of the holiday swirl.

Simple anchors to keep you steady:

- **Start or end your day with a ritual.** A few quiet minutes reading, journaling, stretching, or simply sitting with your coffee can signal safety and stillness to your body.
- **Take short pauses.** Even five minutes of quiet, stepping outside, closing your eyes, or listening to music can reset your nervous system.
- **Protect your sleep.** A consistent bedtime, screen limits, or a wind-down routine can help you rest even when your schedule is off.
- **Choose one self-care non-negotiable per day.** This could be a walk, time alone, drinking enough water, eating your favorite breakfast, or texting a friend. It doesn't need to be big, it just needs to be yours.

Did you know?

Your brain loves routine. Even small daily rituals can reduce stress by giving your nervous system something predictable to hold onto, especially during busy or unpredictable times.

Looking for more ways to stay centered this season? Explore tips, tools, and resources on [SmartHealth](#) to help you stay grounded.

SOURCE

Mental Health America: "[Creating healthy routines](#)"
Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO MS | August 2025

Moving forward with care

However this season unfolds, we hope this guide has offered you a few ways to care for yourself, make space for your feelings, and approach the holidays with compassion.

There's no right way to navigate this time, only your way. For more tools, ideas, or resources to support your well-being, you can visit [SmartHealth](#) whenever you need it. Keep going in the ways that feel right for you.

