
About.com Social Anxiety Disorder

How to Cope With Social Anxiety During the Holidays

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Knowing how to cope with social anxiety during the holidays is not easy. This time of year can be stressful for everyone, but for those with [social anxiety disorder \(SAD\)](#)¹ the social pressures and obligations can become overwhelming. For those whose anxiety interferes with daily functioning, the holidays may also be an extremely lonely time of year. In order to survive the holiday season, there are things that you can do to cope with your anxiety.

- **Get a proper [diagnosis](#)² and appropriate [treatment](#)³**

If you are experiencing [symptoms of social anxiety](#)⁴ and are unsure whether they are signs of shyness or something more severe, make an [appointment with your doctor](#)⁵ to discuss your problems. The holidays are a time when people make resolutions for the New Year, and it's a great time to get a handle on problems that may have plagued you for decades. Make a promise to yourself to get help. Coping strategies alone aren't enough to manage SAD -- you need proper treatment.

- **Be choosy about the social engagements that you attend**

If you receive invitations from people whose company you do not enjoy, it is OK to gracefully bow out. But, make sure that you still get out and participate in some social activities. Avoiding social contact altogether is a recipe for becoming more fearful.

- **Keep up your energy and keep stress at bay**

Ensure that you maintain good eating habits and exercise regularly. The endorphins released during exercise can have a calming effect on anxiety. Yoga is especially relaxing. Small animal studies even note that vitamins and minerals found in healthy foods can also help regulate anxiety (while it's not certain the same holds for humans, a nutritious diet can't hurt!) Make sure to get enough sleep and avoid stimulants, such as caffeine and nicotine.

- **Conduct some "social reconnaissance"**

Do as Bernardo Carducci of the Shyness Research Institute at Indiana University suggests and conduct some "social reconnaissance" before attending parties or gatherings. Learn who will be there and what they are interested in. You don't have to be an expert in every topic, but learning a little bit about people's favorite discussion topics will help you carry on conversations. Read the newspaper, magazines, or go online and learn a little bit about current events. Gather some jokes, and get up the courage to try one out.

- **Try volunteering**

If the holidays are a particularly lonely time for you, offer to help out at a local soup kitchen or distribute gifts to needy children. Volunteering gives you the chance to meet new people and work with them towards a common goal -- a great basis for new friendships. It also gives you something interesting to talk about if your social calendar includes parties or family gatherings.

- **Use coping techniques when anxiety builds**

There are many [self-help strategies](#)⁶ that you can use if you feel social anxiety beginning to creep back into your life. The holidays are a time of year when all emotions become magnified, and anxiety is no exception.

Practicing deep breathing techniques⁷ and learning to control negative automatic thoughts⁸ are two great ways to manage anxiety during times of stress.

- **Ask your family for help**

Having a great support system in place will make the process of overcoming social anxiety and managing your disorder that much easier. However, your family may not always know what it is that you need, and they may forget to ask during this busy time of year. Tell them how you are feeling and let them know what they can do to help.⁹

- **Be the early-bird**

Have you ever arrived at a party or gathering when everyone was already there and felt like the outsider looking in? Not sure where to start or who to talk to? Try to be one of the first people to arrive at the next holiday party and meet people as they come in. This gives you a chance to ease into the situation and gradually speak to people, instead of being faced with a group all at once.

- **Avoid using alcohol for "liquid courage"**

The holidays can be a dangerous time of year for those who tend to use alcohol as a coping strategy for dealing with social anxiety. Although one glass of wine, or a swig of spiked eggnog might help ease pre-party jitters, overindulging will impair your ability to interact effectively with others. Set yourself up for success by planning ahead how much (or if) you will drink, and what other methods¹⁰ you will use for coping with anxiety.

- **Take time for yourself**

The holidays can be a particularly busy time of the year, and it's important to put your own mental health first. If family obligations tend to wear you ragged, make a plan for how much time you will spend with relatives and stick to it. Then, make sure that the time you *do* spend with family counts.

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