

If you're feeling overwhelmed by the upcoming holidays, you're not alone. Lots of people struggle with living up to the holiday season's expectations. While it's usually a happy, joyful time of year, that's not always true for everyone.

Here are a few reasons why Neurodivergent people may struggle with this time of the year and how you can cope:

Difficulty planning ahead: Figuring out what needs to be done, when, and what is most important. You may not be able to do everything you want or need to do (and that's okay!)

Difficulty with transitions and changes: Try to introduce changes gradually at home. Only introduce a few small changes to your schedule each time. Practice coping skills for things you cannot control. Be kind to yourself.

Sensory issues: Be aware of what your sensory issues are and try your best to explain them to other people. Use coping skills and have an exit plan if you need to excuse yourself. Make sure you have a safe, comfortable place when you come home to decompress.

Allergies or food sensitivities: Be aware of your needs, whether it's avoiding nuts, dairy, etc., and let others around you know if you feel comfortable talking about it. Make sure to carry any medication you may have in case of exposure and/or a reaction.

Physical and/or mental health issues: This is a common time of year to get sick. It's a good time to eat healthy and get enough sleep. It's also a great idea to practice good hygiene, like washing your hands. Taking care of your mental health can influence your physical health, too.

Past traumas or negative associations: Lots of people have issues with negative or unpleasant memories. Try to be aware and change things as needed to help avoid past triggers. If you find yourself in a situation where you feel "stuck," having a previously chosen and trusted person discreetly offer support can be incredibly helpful. They can help you leave the setting, process your feelings, and/or suggest any coping strategies that have worked in the past.

Low funds: Plan your budget and discuss holiday expectations ahead of time so you can be careful how you spend money. Physical gifts aren't always necessary. Talk about what is most important to enjoy the holidays with a trusted family member or friend.

Boundaries: Understanding your personal boundaries and communicating those to others is essential. Make sure you don't overdo it before, during, and after a holiday activity or event. Take time to relax and recuperate.

Understanding "unwritten rules": People often have ideas of what they want the holidays to be like, but they often don't talk about what they want or need to be successful. It can be easy to have misunderstandings occur because of a lack of communication.

Self-care is different for everyone: Knowing what works best for you takes time and effort. Also, be aware that your self-care needs may change throughout your life.