



10 Tips for Surviving Winter Holiday Travel

The holidays are the busiest time of the year for long-distance travel. Airports are crowded and chaotic, winter weather conditions can throw us curveballs and unforeseen circumstances can trigger a lot of stress.

When leaving your usual routine and surroundings, and adding the overall stress of travel, challenges might come up that trigger symptoms of a pre-existing mental health condition to flare or new issues to surface for the first time.

“While the destination for many people can be a boost for mental health, travel itself can intensify stress levels rather than alleviate them,” says Sarah Hamid-Balma, Director of Mental Health Promotion, CMHA BC Division. “However, it’s important to recognize that you’re not alone if you find traveling stressful and there are ways to protect our mental well-being.”

Research has found that the most common stressful travel experiences are related to pre-travel issues such as planning, financial concerns, packing and making travel arrangements. But some people also have stressful experiences during the trip such as coping with weather conditions, traffic jams, flight delays, conflict with travel partners, and transportation.

The good news, however, is that in many cases, there are practical ways to prevent travel anxiety from ruining our vacation!

1. Identify your stressors

Identifying the stressors that impact you the most is the first step in helping you combat them. Problem solve by writing down all of your anxious feelings and worries on paper before you travel, and then think of a few solutions so you can plan how to respond in a worst-case scenario.

2. Plan ahead

Discount flights in the middle of the night might cost less, but sometimes if you can afford it, it’s worth spending more for daytime flights with fewer stops.

Early flights can be a much better alternative during the holidays as, statistically, they tend to leave on time. They may even be less packed, because many people would rather sleep in than travel early.

Crowds can be a large source of anxiety for some people and while long lines are inevitable during the holiday season, they’ll be less overwhelming during off-peak times or days.

3. Allow plenty of time

Early is the rule of thumb for stress-free travel!

- Booking your tickets early eliminates the worry of not getting the dates, seating and other preferences that you want.
- Leaving a few days early allows you some wiggle room in case you need to make flight changes due to weather or other last-minute issues.

- Leaving for the airport early means that if there are delays you can handle them without any additional pressure.
- Getting to the airport early makes going through security less stressful.

And don't forget to check in online the day before so that all you need to do is drop your luggage off before heading through security.

4. Stay hydrated and pack snacks

When you are rushing to keep to a tight schedule and catch connecting flights, you may not have time to stop for food (and you may also be reluctant to pay the high prices in airport restaurants if money is a stressor). However, it is important to make sure that you take care of your body, which means staying hydrated and nourished. Pack water and light-weight but filling travel-friendly snacks to help restore your energy such as, granola bars, dried fruit and nuts.

Avoid alcoholic beverages before or during flights as alcohol can increase dehydration, which can affect mood, energy levels and the ability to think clearly.

5. Pack light with minimal bags

When it comes to packing, pack light and keep the number of bags to a minimum.

Try to avoid carrying lots of Christmas gifts for friends and family by ordering online and having them delivered to the recipient directly.

6. Prepare a self-care kit

All the preparation in the world may not be enough to make travel a stress-free experience. So preparing a travel self-care kit before leaving home may come in handy! Music is great for reducing anxiety when travel becomes stressful. Pull together a soothing playlist of songs to listen to in order to relax. Listening to your favorite songs can have a huge difference on your mood.

Perhaps meditation helps you feel grounded, in that case make the most of the time in the air you may wish to download meditations from an app like Calm or Headspace.

7. Know the rules and regulations when it comes to medications

If you are travelling with prescription medication for a mental health condition, it's important to research your destination country's drug importation laws to see if your medication is regulated. Many medications for treating mental health conditions are highly regulated and countries impose restrictions on the amount and type of medication that can be imported.

Carry your medications in their original containers and bring a letter from the prescribing physician indicating that the medicines have been prescribed for medical reasons (including health condition, and the dosage prescribed).

8. Be mindful of how you're feeling

When you get to your destination, don't be afraid to take a break from your planned activities if you need to relax and recharge. Keep up routines that make you feel stable such as exercise or meditation. It can be a good idea to pack a few items to help you relax at the end of a challenging day, such as a journal, music or your running shoes.

9. Stay physically healthy

Maintain a healthy sleep schedule as best you can; this can help diminish stress while on vacation. Eating properly is a must, but avoid over-indulging too much over the holidays. The roller coaster of high blood sugar followed by a crash may accentuate the symptoms of mood disorders.

10. Try to relax and don't feel guilty

Remember that recharging is just as important as working and that you deserve this time off. If you aren't getting enough time to relax, you may find yourself feeling tense and stressed out.

Making time to find enjoyment is also an important element of relaxation. Laughing decreases pain, may help your heart and lungs, promotes muscle relaxation and can reduce anxiety.

If you are travelling from Vancouver International Airport (YVR) you can check out [Fly Calm](#) which includes a host of new resources, including an interactive website with a number of videos as well as an on-the-go colouring book to help travellers de-stress before a flight.

About CMHA

Founded in 1918, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. Through a presence in hundreds of neighbourhoods across every province, CMHA provides advocacy and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive. Visit the CMHA BC website at: www.cmha.bc.ca.

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