

Conquering Year-End Anxieties & Embracing a Fresh Start

The end of the year can provoke a mix of emotions, chief among them anxiety. Reflecting on the past 12 months of experiences — good, bad and in-between — and contemplating what’s ahead can be stressful. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association, 41% of adults report that their stress increases during the holiday season.

A looming new year often makes us focus on the things we left undone — the resolutions not kept or the goals not achieved. The weight of unfulfilled expectations can be heavy, and as the year-end nears, the urge to make up for lost time can be daunting. This pressure, combined with what many call “post-holiday depression,” or winter doldrums, can sometimes make the transition into a new year feel more oppressive than exciting.

Post-holiday depression is a well-documented phenomenon, often linked to the emotional comedown after the holiday season’s highs. The festive period, with its gatherings, celebrations and a general atmosphere of cheer, contrasts with the quiet of the days that follow. As the lights come down and the decorations are packed away, the reality of a long, cold winter sets in, and with it, a sense of melancholy can be hard to shake.

The key to managing the emotions associated with the new year lies in shifting our perspective. Rather than viewing the end of the year as a deadline by which all things must be accomplished, we should see it as an opportunity for reflection and a fresh start. Here are a few mindful tips to help approach the new year with hope rather than anxiety:

Release the Pressure to Make Resolutions

Resolutions can feel like a burden, especially when they are made from a sense of obligation. Instead of pressuring yourself to set goals on January 1st, recognize that new beginnings can happen at any time of the year. There’s no rule that says you must wait until January 1st to make positive changes in your life.

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64% of Americans have reported experiencing post-holiday blues.

National Alliance on Mental Illness

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Focus on What You Have Accomplished

Instead of dwelling on what you didn't achieve, take a moment to acknowledge the successes, big and small, that you've experienced over the past year. Reflecting on your accomplishments can shift your mindset from one of scarcity and need to one of abundance and gratitude.

Embrace the Present Moment

Mindfulness is a powerful tool for reducing anxiety. By focusing on the present, you can reduce the tendency to dwell on the past or worry about the future. Practices like deep breathing, meditation or simply taking a walk in nature can help ground you and bring a sense of calm during this transitional period.

Set Intentions, Not Resolutions

Intentions are softer and more flexible than resolutions. They're about the direction you want your life to take rather than specific outcomes you want to achieve (i.e. "I want to make healthy changes to my routine" rather than "I want to lose thirty pounds by March 1"). Setting intentions allows you to align your actions with your values without the pressure of rigid expectations.

Practice Self-Compassion

Be kind to yourself as the year ends. Life is unpredictable, and we all face challenges that can derail even the best-laid plans. Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding that you would offer a friend in a similar situation.

Use Resources to Make a Plan and Rest

Entering a new year armed with the right help can allow you to make a plan and ease anxieties. Take advantage of resources that may be available through your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in dealing with stress, finances and wellness. The end of the year is also a good time to use any paid time off (PTO) you may have so you can rest, recharge and reflect before the start of a new year. You've earned it!

By taking a mindful approach and releasing the pressure to meet arbitrary deadlines or expectations, you can embrace the fresh start. Remember, the new year is just a date on the calendar. It's what you make of it that truly matters.

#HopeForTheHolidays #StressLess

If you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health this holiday season, contact the Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line by texting **MHA** to 741-741.