



A Supportive Guide for Patients and Partners

Coping with Trying to Conceive During the Holidays

*Practical tools, emotional support, and perspectives
from patients and fertility specialists.*



Why the Holidays Can Feel Heavy

The holidays can shine a bright light on hopes, losses, plans, and expectations. If you're trying to conceive, this season may bring complicated emotions: joy mixed with grief, hope tangled with exhaustion. You are not alone in this. This guide shares tools, stories, and gentle practices to help you move through the holidays in a way that feels grounded and compassionate toward yourself.



Stephanie Curran, R.TCM.P
Mindfulness Instructor & Acupuncturist
Elements of Health Centre

A Mindfulness Instructor's Perspective

The holidays can stir up memories, expectations, and grief when you are trying to conceive. From a mindfulness perspective, this season can be an invitation to pause, listen inward, and honour what you are truly feeling.

Small grounding practices and “micro-moments” of presence can help steady your nervous system and make space for a holiday that feels a bit gentler.



Dr. Riki Dayan, FRCSC
Reproductive Expert | Olive Fertility

A Fertility Doctor's Perspective

Holidays often disrupt routines, increase social pressure, and create emotional stress. Your fertility team knows how heavy this time of year can feel. Stress alone does not prevent pregnancy, and taking breaks to protect your emotional health is valid and important.

If you're in the middle of treatment, your care team can help you plan around travel, clinic closures, or medication schedules. If you're taking a pause, your body and mind may benefit from the rest.

Most of all: be kind to yourself. Your path is not defined by one season.

Finding Hygge: Small Pockets of Warmth and Ease

Hygge (pronounced “hoo-gah”) describes cozy contentment and simple togetherness. It’s a gentle way to move through the season with warmth, calm, and a sense of belonging.

Light the space

Use lamplight, candles, or twinkle lights. Soft lighting helps the body settle on dark evenings.

Simplify your rituals

Keep one or two traditions that actually nourish you—tea before bed, a favourite recipe, a slow dusk walk—and let the rest go.

Choose gentle company

Seek small, easy moments with people who help you exhale, or enjoy a quiet solo evening with music and a blanket.

Make a hygge corner

Create one welcoming spot like a comfy chair, a throw, a warm lamp, a book, and a few simple comforts. A ready nook makes rest feel accessible.

Hygge is about noticing small moments of ease. Even during a tender season, tiny bits of warmth can steady you.

Create a comfort menu

A comfort menu is a small list you can turn to on days when energy or emotions feel

low. It takes the pressure off decision making and gives you quick access to things that help your nervous system settle.

Try choosing one or two options and let that be enough:

A soothing drink such as tea or hot chocolate, anything that helps your body soften.

A nourishing snack that’s easy to prepare and digest. Think fruit, toast, soup, yogurt, or whatever feels gentle.

A calming sound like nature sounds, favourite song, guided breathwork, or even a fireplace video.

A soothing scent such as citrus peel or cinnamon simmering in water.

A small, safe connection — text a friend, share a photo, or sit with a pet.



Mindfulness & Breathwork for Navigating the Holidays

Adapted from Stephanie Curran, R.TCM.P

Ground to Grow program

The holidays can be tender when you're trying to conceive: social events, questions, announcements, memories of "where you thought you'd be by now." These simple practices are designed to help you steady your nervous system and stay connected to yourself, one small moment at a time.

The Three-Breath Pause

A tiny reset you can use in the car, in the bathroom at a party, or before bed.

Breath One / Acknowledge

Notice what's here: "This is really hard right now."

Breath Two / Ground

Feel your feet on the floor or the weight of your body in the chair.

Breath Three / Support

Inhale gently, then lengthen the exhale. You might add, "May I be kind to myself in this moment."

Repeat as often as needed.

Ground Through Your Senses

When emotions swell and your mind starts to spin, come back to your senses:

5 things you can **SEE**

(shapes, colours, light).

4 things you can **FEEL**

(feet on the floor, clothing on your skin, the chair under you).

3 things you can **HEAR**

(nearby sounds, then further away).

2 things you can **SMELL**

(or a smell you love and remember).

1 thing you can **TASTE**

(or simply notice the taste in your mouth).

Move slowly. This helps you "step out of the swirl" and back into the present moment.

Hand-on-Heart Self-Compassion

Holidays often amplify comparison and self-criticism. This practice invites a kinder inner tone.

Place a hand on your heart (or another soothing place, like your belly).

Feel the warmth and gentle pressure of your hand.

Let your shoulders soften.



Silently offer yourself phrases such as:

“This is a painful moment.”

“Others struggle with this too.”

“May I be gentle with myself right now.”

Use this after a difficult comment or whenever you notice your inner critic getting loud.

Take It in Small Doses Titrating Tough Moments)

You don't need to “be with” everything all at once. It's okay to take breaks.

Turn toward it, briefly:

Notice, “That announcement really hurt.”
Feel the emotion in your body for a few slow breaths.

Then step back:

Shift your attention to something neutral: your feet on the floor, your hands on a warm mug, or the rhythm of your breath.

Add movement, if you need it:

Excuse yourself to the washroom, step outside, or take a short walk to reset.

Think of it like gently turning a dimmer switch up and down to protect your nervous system.

Lengthen the Exhale

A longer exhale helps signal safety and calm to your body. This can be especially helpful before sleep or after a stressful event.

Try for 1–3 minutes:

- 1 **Inhale gently** through the nose to a count of 4.
- 2 **Exhale slowly** to a count of 6 (or a little longer, if comfortable).
- 3 **As you exhale**, silently say: “Softening.” or “Letting go.”

Free Audio Support: The Grounding Guide

These tools come from *Ground to Grow*, a mindfulness program created for people on the fertility path. If you'd like extra support, you can access the free Grounding Guide – a set of short audio practices to use before or after holiday gatherings, on procedure days, or anytime you need a steadier foothold.

Access the free practices here:
stephaniecurran.com



Nourishing Hot Chocolate

1 cup milk of choice
1 tablespoon raw cacao powder
or dark cocoa powder
1 tablespoon pure maple syrup
(or honey, agave, coconut sugar)
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
A small pinch of fine sea salt

Warm and whisk all ingredients together in a saucepan over medium heat. Heat until smooth and steamy, no boil.

Add more cacao for richness or more sweetener for balance.

Pour into a mug and enjoy warm. Add any favourite topping.

Why Raw Cacao Is Nourishing

Raw cacao is the minimally processed form of the cacao bean, made by cold-pressing unroasted cacao. Because it isn't exposed to high heat like traditional cocoa powder, it retains these heat-sensitive nutrients:

Magnesium for muscle relaxation, sleep, and stress regulation

Iron supporting energy production and red blood cell formation

Polyphenols reducing inflammation and improving cardiovascular health

These compounds give raw cacao a stronger nutritional profile than standard cocoa powders, making it a warming, nutrient-dense choice during the winter season.

Yummy Macaroons

Here is one of our sugar-free, gluten-free, dairy-free holiday favourites to try. Super easy to make and free of allergens.

1½ cups unsweetened shredded coconut
1 tablespoon coconut flour
⅛ teaspoon sea salt
2 tablespoons coconut oil, melted
¼ cup honey
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

In a food processor, combine shredded coconut and coconut flour.

Pulse in salt, coconut oil, honey, and vanilla.

Scoop batter 1 level tablespoon at a time onto a parchment paper lined baking sheet.

Bake at 350°F for 7-10 minutes.

Cool for 1 hour.



Navigating Holiday Gatherings

Protective Strategies

Choose which events truly matter to you.

Build an exit plan with a partner or friend.
Use grounding tools before and after social events.

Create a “safe person” to text if things feel overwhelming.

Treat Yourself with Care

A small new item – earrings, a cozy sweater, a bag, or a pair of shoes – can bring a moment of comfort during a season that can feel tender. It doesn’t need to be expensive; just something that makes you smile and feel a little more like yourself.

Support Your Well-Being with Tools That Help

If you use reflective tools like our planning guide on page 8 or another guided resource, this can be a meaningful time to gift yourself something supportive. These kinds of practices help you stay anchored to what nourishes you, set gentle intentions, and enter the new year with a sense of steadiness.

Look Ahead with Kindness

Consider one or two things you hope to explore or experience in the coming year. Turning those hopes into small, achievable steps can offer a sense of direction and help you feel more in control of your path.

Give Yourself Permission to Step Back

If certain gatherings feel overwhelming, it’s okay to decline. You can simply say you’re taking care of your emotional wellbeing, or offer a brief excuse if that feels easier. Protecting your mental and emotional space is an act of care.

Prepare for Tender Questions

Family events sometimes come with unexpected or uncomfortable questions. Having a response ready, one that shares only what you feel comfortable sharing, can help you move through the moment with more ease.

Create New Traditions

Consider starting a tradition that feels meaningful to you and your partner, or with friends. Small rituals like making a favourite meal, a winter walk, a holiday movie night can help root the season in connection and memory, rather than comparison or expectation.

Be Kind to Yourself

Your feelings are valid. Sadness, jealousy, frustration, or anything else that may come up at this time of year. Instead of judging yourself, try simply noticing what you feel and offering yourself compassion. Lean into small things that bring comfort or make you smile.

Make Space for Rest

The holidays can fill up quickly with errands, hosting, deadlines, and family plans. Try to intentionally set aside time

for yourself—quiet moments to recharge, breathe, and settle your nervous system in the midst of busyness.

Plan Nourishing Time Together

If you have a break from work, use it to create gentle plans with your partner or close friends. Choose activities that genuinely feel good—your favourite walk, a meal out, a cozy movie night—anything that reconnects you with joy and ease.

Focus on What You Do Have

It's common to notice what's missing during the holidays. This year, try shifting your attention toward what's present and meaningful in your life. A short gratitude list—people, moments, comforts—can help bring balance to the emotional landscape of the season.

If You're Not Drinking This Year

Instead of gatherings centred on alcohol, consider planning meals out, daytime outings, or low-key activities where connection—not drinking—is the focus.

If You Prefer to Keep That Private

If you're meeting people in settings where drinking is expected, non-alcoholic options can help you feel included without sharing more than you want to. Mocktails, alcohol-free versions of familiar drinks, or simply saying you're driving can make things easier. Confiding in one trusted friend can also help take the pressure off.

Scripts and Boundaries

If someone asks about pregnancy plans:

"We're taking things one step at a time."

"Thanks for thinking of us. We'll share when it feels right."

"We're focusing on what we can control."

"Can we save that conversation for another time?"

If you need to step away:

"I'm going to take a moment to reset."

"I'm just stepping out for a breath. Back soon."

If someone pushes for more information:

"I'm not ready to go into details, but thank you for understanding."

"I appreciate your interest, but I'm not up for that conversation today."



Planning Guide: Your Holiday Support Plan



Prompts for the Season

Plan

How do I want to redefine this season for myself?

What new traditions or rituals can I begin?

What situations or conversations feel triggering for me at this time of year?

What can I do to support myself when I feel triggered, or how can I reduce those moments?

Who or what helps me cope when things feel overwhelming?

How do I want to feel during this season?

Notes

Gentle Self-Care Ideas for the Season

A warm bath with soft music.
A holiday movie that feels comforting.
A walk under winter lights.
A morning stretch routine.
Journaling for 5 minutes.
A day with no obligations.

Short evidence-based reminders:

- Anticipating hard moments often makes them easier to cope with.
- Grief and joy can coexist.
- You don't have to feel festive to participate meaningfully.
- Rest is an active part of resilience.

Acupuncture for Stress and Well-Being

Acupuncture offers a quiet pause in the fullness of everyday life. Using very fine, sterile needles placed at specific points on the body, acupuncture supports the nervous system in shifting out of “constant alert” and into a more restful, regulated state. Many people describe feeling deeply calm during and after a treatment, with less tension in the body and a clearer, more settled mind.

From a physiological perspective, acupuncture can help lower stress hormones, support more restful sleep, ease muscle tightness and headaches, and improve circulation. When you are trying to conceive or moving through fertility treatment, sessions can also be timed and tailored to the different phases of your menstrual and fertility cycle. This gentle, cycle-aware approach works with your body's own balancing systems and can help you feel less wired, less depleted, and more resourced to meet each step of your care.

Emotionally, acupuncture sessions can become a small refuge in your week — a place to lie down, be cared for, and soften so your body can unwind. For many, this combination of physical ease and emotional tending creates a greater sense of well-being, resilience, and hope.

Acupuncture is another evidence-based tool alongside medical care, mindfulness, and other supports to steady you through the stress of the fertility journey.



When to Reach Out for Extra Support

There are times in the winter season when emotions feel heavier, routines become harder to maintain, or the ongoing stress of fertility care adds an extra layer of strain. Reaching out for support can help you feel steadier and less alone.

You might consider connecting with a counsellor, a mental health professional, or someone on your care team if you notice:

Feeling emotionally overwhelmed most days (*persistent sadness, irritability, or frequent crying spells*)

Changes in sleep or appetite (*difficulty falling or staying asleep, sleeping too much, skipping meals, or overeating*)

A sense of hopelessness or persistent low mood (*feeling stuck, flat, or unable to find relief*)

Strain in relationships (*more conflict, withdrawing from your partner, or feeling unsupported*)

Avoiding most social contact (*cancelling plans, isolating yourself, or feeling unable to connect*)

Intrusive or spiralling thoughts (*rumination, constant worry, or thoughts that feel hard to manage on your own*)

You don't have to wait until things feel unbearable.

Support is not a last resort. It's a resource. Reaching out is an act of strength and care for yourself, and your team is here to help you navigate whatever comes next.



Resources + Clinic Support

Olive Clinics

Vancouver 604-559-9950

Monday - Friday: 7:15 AM - 4:00 PM

Sat, Sun and Statutory holidays:

7:15 AM - 3:00 PM

Victoria 250-410-1664

Monday - Friday 7:30 AM - 3:30 PM

Kelowna 250-861-6814

Monday - Thursday: 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM

Friday: 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM

Surrey 604-559-9950

Monday - Friday 7:15 AM - 3:00 PM

General Inquiries & Appointment Requests

olivefertility.com

After-Hours Support

If you are in an active IVF or monitoring cycle, please follow the emergency/on-call contact instructions provided in your clinic package.

For urgent symptoms outside clinic hours (such as severe pain, heavy bleeding, fever, or signs of OHSS), patients may also consider:

811 (HealthLink BC) for nurse advice

Local Urgent Care Centre

Nearest Emergency Department,
if needed

Acupuncture

Vancouver

Acubalance

888 W 8th Ave #208

604-678-8600

acubalance.ca

Victoria

Elements of Health Centre

#206 - 1581 Hillside Ave.

250-383-2626

elementscentre.ca

Counsellors

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Mindfulness

Ground to Grow

Online practices and programs

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