

Defeating Holiday Stress



Tips to Beating the Stress of the Holiday Season

Alice Domar, a psychologist and director of the Mind/Body Center for Women's Health at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center/Harvard Medical School makes some suggestions to cutting yourself some slack this holiday season.

- **Smart shopping.** Domar suggests taking a personal day off of work during the first week of December to use as a shopping day. Start in the early morning on a day in the middle of the week. When your hands get full, take the gifts to the car and go back in for more. Domar gives a tip to buy something you like in various colors, which will provide a number of gifts. It is also smart to shop online or through catalogs at home so you do not have to go out and experience the chaos of shopping centers.
- **Reward yourself.** After a long day of shopping and buying gifts for everyone else, it is important to reward yourself with a little gift. This gift does not have to cost a lot of money just something cheap to rejuvenate yourself like a book or delicious coffee drink.
- **Skip the multiple annual holiday events.** Instead of dragging your friends and family to every annual event such as the Nutcracker and the tree lightings, try picking one or two events to enjoy. These are annual events and can be experienced the next holiday season. Many holiday events can become stressful when trying to rearrange everyone's schedules to attend.
- **Expand the holiday season.** Everyone throws parties around the same weekends as each other during the holidays. It gets hectic trying to balance the parties out – Which event do you attend? How do you make time for your bash? Try throwing a party after the New Year, about two weeks into January. The party will still be close enough to the holiday season to enjoy but far enough out so not to mix with the chaos and lack of time due to the many events taking place in December.

Planning the Events without the Stress

Robert Sapolsky a professor of biological sciences and neurology at Stanford University offers some suggestions to planning your holiday events or gatherings without the stress.

- **No expectations.** Do not hold high expectations when it comes to family and/or friend get-togethers', this will cause much unneeded stress. You will lose quality time with your loved ones by constantly worrying if something is going to go wrong. Go ahead and plan for problems, it is not going to be a perfect time for everyone. Remember to enjoy each other and the time you have together during the holidays.
- **Do not perform alone for the holidays.** When planning events do not take on all of the responsibilities yourself, divide up the tasks evenly so not to stress anyone out. Try to spend as much time as you can with friends and family so that you can avoid the feeling of loneliness which comes with this time of year. Talk out your plans and feelings with one another many times you will discover others feel the same way.

More Tips to Reducing Holiday Stress

The following are further suggestions to aid in reducing one's holiday stress level:

1. Make a to-do list time line so to keep up with tasks in a timely manner. This way you will not overload yourself with everything at once.
2. Make lists of the events to attend or plan for by asking yourself the following questions: How many people will you be entertaining? Will you need gifts? What will you bake, and what ingredients will you need to have prepared? What will need to be cleaned?
3. Look at catalogs for gift ideas, address cards, and create crafts as you are watching television-multi-task!
4. Have dinners where the guests all contribute by bringing his/her favorite dish; this way the pressure is off of you to prepare all of the food.
5. Share baby-sitting responsibilities with friends/neighbors so you can shop or take a day for yourself during this busy time to relax kid-free.
6. Set a 'December savings account' each January where you put a small portion of each paycheck into the account. You will find every little bit can add up to a decent holiday budget for gift buying, which will eliminate the stress of holiday expenses.



Eating for Energy Tips

Judith Wurtman, a nutritional biochemist and researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology suggests some healthy eating tips to aid in battling stress over the holidays.

- **Snacks to charge the body and brain.** It is good to carry snacks with you over the hectic holiday season. Not just any snacks though, a low or no fat carbohydrate to keep the brain alert and the body energized during those long hours of shopping and standing in lines. Carbohydrates help to produce the chemical serotonin which causes a calming effect in the body. Wurtman suggests carrying pretzels or whole grain snacks. If you crave sugar, carry a few tootsie rolls or jellybeans, not to exceed 30 grams of sugar.
- **Eat several 'mini-meals.'** Divide your meals up, instead of eating 3 large meals a day, break the meals down to 6 'mini-meals.' Do not increase your calorie intake, the calories should stay the same. The energy one gets after a meal will only last about 2 to 3 hours time, then you will begin to feel the effects of hunger.
- **Tend to the things that cause your stress.** Stress will lead to eating richer or more 'comfort' foods which will add weight, and leading to more stress for oneself. Pinpoint the things that bring you stress and fix them. If you are overloaded by work at home, make a to-do list for everyone to pitch in and help.





Holiday Stress- Buster Gift Ideas (provided by Susie Mantell with Relaxintuit.com)

Below are some suggestions to very meaningful, stress reducer, gift ideas as well as some low cost and/or free ideas for everyone (him or her).

- Massage, facial, or pedicure from a local beauty or health spa.
- Basket of bath oils, candles, herbal teas, lotions, massage oils, and/or bubble bath
- Soothing/relaxation CD's
- Certificates to yoga, tai chi, dance, sculpting, art, or watercolor classes
- Night Out of recipients choice
- Baby-sitting time
- Theater/concert tickets
- Movie rental gift certificates and popcorn
- Surprise weekend getaway
- Blind-folded surprise of some kind (i.e. dinner by candlelight / dinner in bed– you prepared)
- Spa day or weekend to get pampered
- Bring in one of their good old friends for a visit
- Mindless 'brain candy' books/videos
- Health club membership
- Certificates for a day of golf
- Provide back, foot and head rubs for free
- Create a "do not disturb day"
- Provide a day of child care
- Take a few car pool shifts

