

Holiday Stress Management: Four Tips to Help You Enjoy all the Fa La Las

Decking the halls and spreading good cheer can be stressful. Here are some tips to make sure you enjoy every last fa la la.

1. Stay Centered. An energized and peaceful holiday season is possible only when you can keep your priorities straight. Take a pen and paper and ask yourself: What do you value, above all else? What comes second? Third? How important is your spirituality, your family, your profession, your time for yourself? After some thought and reflection, rank your top priorities on a Post it Note where you will see it throughout the day. (Mine is on my computer monitor). Refer to your list when asked to make commitments and compromises. If the request does not jibe with your list, you do not only have permission, you have an obligation, to say no. This list of priorities may set the course for new holiday traditions, as well. Maybe you will donate toys, books, and food to charities. Maybe you will help serve dinner at a homeless shelter in lieu of a holiday meal.
2. Indulge the ghost of Christmas Past. What memories immediately come forth that evoke a fond nostalgia? For me, it is not the gifts or the shopping or even the parties. It is rocking my infant, alone, by candlelight, to "Silent Night." It is letting my 2 year old crack the eggs for the cookies, and seeing the pride on her floury face. Decide what the holidays really mean to you. What is really important? Then make a plan to weave more of those activities into your holidays, and reduce the rest.
3. Deck the Halls with Light and Love. Do not let commercialism spoil your fun. Make the simple promise to yourself that, this year, you will actually enjoy your holiday shopping. Brainstorm ways you can make this happen. For me, the mall is a giant energy drain. The look of worried resignation as a shopper hands over her credit card tells me that she is shopping out of a sense of obligation and not one of joy. And it sours my holiday spirit. Instead, I carve out an afternoon all to myself. I put on an Andrea Bocelli CD, sip Chai tea from a giant mug, and curl up with a fleece blanket to surf the Internet and page through catalogs. That is how I find just the right something for everyone on my list. When it ceases to be fun, I stop. I so enjoy shopping this way that, throughout the year, I bookmark sites that offer just the right items. If you find the materialism of the season draining your energy, commit to making an attitude shift. If you want things to be different this year, only you can make it so. Take the lead for your family, and live in such a way that you prove less stuff really does equal more fun. Maybe you will take the money you usually spend on one too many toys and enjoy, instead, a weekend family getaway. Maybe you will make homemade goodies, such as picture frames, home movies, or goodie baskets, which the whole family helps to create. Maybe you will bag the traditional gift giving and start a new tradition. In our family, it goes like this: Each guest brings a wrapped gift of roughly the same dollar value. We sit in a circle and each person, in turn, has the option of taking a gift that is already been opened or opening a new one. It is fun, festive, it gets everyone moving and talking, and it switches the focus to the relationships and the event...not the gifts.
4. Start early, plan well, and take care of yourself. Here are some tips: Simplify as much as possible. Use paper plates. Eat out. If a holiday tradition is old and tired, reinvigorate it or start a new tradition of staying at home. Plan ahead. To help, chances are, your favorite food website has a checklist for big holiday events. Replenish your natural energy by taking care of your body. Eat right. Exercise (in the crisp outdoors once in a while). Drink plenty of water. Sleep. Energize your image. Give yourself an early holiday gift or a great haircut, a brow shaping, a pedicure with bright red polish, or a free makeover at your favorite cosmetics counter and a purchase of the most vibrant lipstick shade you will actually wear. Decorate with items of comfort and joy. Display photographs from past holiday celebrations. Keep in full view reminders that you take care of yourself...fresh flowers, indulgent hand cream, inspiring music, and energizing scents, such as citrus or peppermint. Spend the season with your most energetic friends. Instead of letting the Scrooges in your life yank you down, send them something sweet from a Secret Santa. A little anonymous enchantment may be just what they need. Keep a "Joy Journal" this holiday season, in which you record the funny things your kids say, joyful times you share, your favorite things to do with your family (and by yourself), and all the things for which you are grateful. Use your Joy Journal as a reminder of the facets of your life (and this holiday season) that are really important.

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