

A More “Chill” Holiday Season: How to Relax the Week Before Christmas

At a glance:

- Look at ways to do less in the holiday home stretch
- Plan some relaxation
- Savor a more serene holiday season — and you may develop an important new tradition

If you made a list of all the extra things on your list this time of year, what would it say? Writing to-do lists? Addressing cards? Shopping, wrapping, household chores? Making food, seeing friends, getting together with family . . . and on and on?

It's a lot.

It's not too late to make a *new* list — of things that are *good* for you during the holidays. There are ways you can divide a few responsibilities, tend to your well-being — and even relax a little.

A recent American Psychological Association (APA) survey showed that 89 percent of U.S. adults feel stressed during the holidays. Lack of time, financial pressure, gift-giving and family gatherings can add up to one big Christmas stocking full of stress.

There's still time to tap the brakes, cross some things out — and enjoy a mindful holiday season.

1. **Say no.** It's OK to say no to anything that hasn't gotten done. While that doesn't mean don't buy those last few gifts for the kids, it can mean the house doesn't have to be perfect, ordering gift cards can be OK, and you don't necessarily have to send ALL those holiday cards or say yes to every invitation. Less to plan for, shop for, and get ready for means reduced stress.
2. **Share your to-do list.** Delegate to the rest of your family, not just you the parents. Many hands make light work, and sharing holiday preparations around the home can build meaningful family togetherness.
3. **Create relaxing surroundings.** This is a “to do” that feels great. Make it a habit to give yourself the gift of rejuvenation on a regular basis: Turn on some music. Light a few candles. Plop down on the couch. Read a book. Enjoy a beverage. Take a nap. Watch a funny movie — laughing calms the whole body. Physically and purposefully relaxing truly reduces stress.

4. **Maintain healthy habits.** A short morning workout or brisk walk does wonders for energy levels. Throughout the day, eating healthy snacks like fresh fruit or vegetables is not only good for you, it's a good habit to be in before those tempting but unhealthy spreads you know are coming.
5. **Spend time with people who "fill your cup."** People who just make you feel happy are the gifts you can give yourself. Take an hour or two to jump-start your joy with those easy relationships that feed your soul.
6. **Be good with the gatherings.** Family gatherings can be very fun — or a little fraught. When it's time to get together with extended family, remember in advance that different people often have different ways of being and differing viewpoints on lots of things. Focus on your similarities, smile from your heart, and replace tension with a happy mantra: Goodwill to all! It'll be so much easier now that you've tended to you.

A full 71 percent of respondents to the APA survey cited above said their biggest regret each holiday season was not taking time to relax and enjoy themselves. This holiday season, let go of "must do's" and take care of you. You'll be better for yourself and everyone else — and you just might create a new holiday tradition for everyone you love.