

A Guide for Planning a Stress-Free Holiday

The biggest stress of all is that of having expectations—those that others have of us and those we impose upon ourselves. Expectations of how the holidays *should be* may keep us from enjoying a period of simpler, more meaningful joys.

Here are our suggestions, drawn from many sources, for having an enjoyable, loving and stress-free holidays this season.

Start planning now:

10 weeks in advance (October)



Pre-planning. Lay out a timetable and don't get caught up in being rushed to fit things in at the last minute

Check the calendar now. When does Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, New Year's and other holidays occur?

Ask yourself these questions about previous holidays to define your planning.

- What do you remember best about the holidays?
- What was draining and stress-producing?
- Is there something about holiday time you'd like to re-capture?

Use your answers to make healthful changes to lessen stress this year. If family and friends will be involved in your new plans, **propose and negotiate changes with them now**, before schedules are set.

Determine who will help. We don't have to do it all and we don't have to do it all alone. Enlist others, set priorities, and simplify!

8 weeks in advance (beginning of November)

Set limits according to your personal situation.



Other ways to control holiday pressures:

Eliminate stressful long-distance visits that you've made in previous years.

If certain rituals trigger sadness, change them or **create new traditions** to replace them.

Organize your gift list. **Shop now** to avoid crowded stores and out-of-stock items.

6 weeks in advance (mid November)



Wrap and label gifts. Keep a list, but put items in a closet or at a friend's house.

Create a list of food specialties you enjoy making, choosing only those that can be baked or cooked and frozen in advance. Begin making those items now and freezing them for holiday parties.

If you enjoy sending **holiday cards** or letters, prepare them now.

4 weeks in advance (Late November, Early December)



Are you entertaining at home? **Assign guests to bring dishes** that must be prepared fresh, such as salad.

Sometimes, **family events may be too stressful.** For some people, **not** being with family is actually a good idea."

Make alternate plans, so you'll feel comfortable declining graciously.

If you feel you must attend, **line up friends to support you in person, by phone or via email.**

Volunteer to help out at a hospital, food pantry, or shelter.



The final (sometimes-crazy) days

You may start having **symptoms of stress** (headache, diarrhea, anxiety, etc.) as the holidays draw near. If so:

Listen to your body and **slow down**.

Eliminate anything left on your to-do list.

Get at least **seven to nine hours sleep every night**.

Take daily walks with a friend, a dog or soothing music on your headphones.

If you use a gym regularly, but the holidays have thrown you off schedule, **take time for a work-out**.

Your emotions and your body will thank you.

Take a few **deep abdominal breaths** to calm you.

