



MAKE HOLIDAYS MORE RELAXING

Tips and techniques to reduce holiday stress and burnout

During the year, we daydream about holidays as a time of celebration, a time to give thanks and a time to gather with family and friends. As soon as November rolls around though, we begin to feel the pressure and responsibilities multiply. Most of us grit our teeth and resign ourselves to the inevitability of holiday stress, but isn't there a better way to cope with it? John Gelb, CEO of At Peace Media a leading producer of music and video products that enhance relaxation and rejuvenation offers his suggestions for reducing holiday stress and burnout:

Q: *Why does it seem that holidays arrive sooner and get more stressful every year?*

A: Your perception is right, the holiday cycle does speed up every year. Candy canes and Christmas lights are put out on store shelves before Halloween in some places. But this doesn't mean that you have to succumb to the pressure. **Make your own list of what you find a meaningful expression of the holiday spirit.** Don't subscribe to the pressure to do what everyone else is doing. Decide what's really important to you and your family and ignore the rest.

Q: *How do you juggle so many elevated expectations from family, friends, business associates and others?*

A: Learn how to say no. Don't make promises you can't keep; if possible, keep things simple and casual rather than elaborate, intimidating and off-putting. **Contrary to conventional wisdom,** this isn't the time of year to impress everyone with how great you are, how lavishly you can entertain or how elevated your taste is. Pick a less busy time of the year to socialize with friends and business associates when everybody isn't feeling stretched so thin. I really enjoy giving and attending parties in late January and February. Most people feel some holiday letdown after the New Year arrives when all the decorations disappear and the dog days of winter set in – it's a great time to entertain because you're not competing with so many other activities.

Q: *Isn't holiday relaxation an oxymoron? Isn't relaxing during the holidays just a fantasy for most people?*

A: It doesn't have to be. **Make lists, and be happy with what you do accomplish rather than berating yourself for everything you didn't do.** Take time for yourself. Set aside some time to listen to quiet, rejuvenating music, to meditate, to get a massage. Don't abandon your exercise regimen or your yoga practice – the things you do to rejuvenate and relax all year will seem even more special and are even more important to your health and well-being at this time of the year. During the winter, when the days are short, I get up earlier so I can do my daily run in the morning. Running = relaxation for me and I know that sunset arrives too early for an evening run.

Q: *I have so much on my mind – so many mental checklists to juggle – it's overwhelming.*

A: **Plan ahead – but don't plan too much.** Before you get to the panic stage, take a look at the big picture and see what you can eliminate or put off until after the holidays. Who says you have to send out holiday cards that arrive before Christmas? I have friends who are putting off their Christmas cards this year because their son is applying to college and they're swamped with paperwork. They're planning to send New

Year's cards sometime in January instead. I have another friend who sends out a Valentine's Day card to everyone instead of a holiday card – figure out what works for you.

Q: *Shopping is so time consuming; it's especially tough to select gifts for out-of-town family members.*

A: **Stress is not site-specific.** If you're stressed out by holiday pressure, chances are good that far-flung family members are feeling the "same pain". Gifts for relaxation are always appreciated. You can usually find a very well-edited selection of gifts for relaxation and rejuvenation at spa locations. Spas often have a great selection of retail products, many of which are used in-house by the estheticians and massage therapists who work there. These people are the experts on what it takes to relax and recharge.

Q: *But how can I minimize or reduce all the traditional obligations?*

A: **The key word here is tradition – if it's not working or causing more stress than it's worth, think of a better way.** Create new traditions that don't fray your nerves with too many expectations and responsibilities. Plan family reunions and get-togethers during off seasons when you can really relax and enjoy one another.

Why not think global but stay local during the holidays? Instead of traveling great distances, treat yourself to a great massage or facial or a day of pampering at a day spa. Avoid the hassles of long-distance travel, stay put and keep your celebrations low key so you can enjoy what you're doing rather than feel like you're on someone else's treadmill.

Q: *Do you have any other recommendations on how to avoid or cope with holiday stress?*

A: **Don't deprive yourself of the tools you need to relax and rejuvenate.** Simple repetitive rituals can make you feel more in control. Set up a space in your home where you can just relax and refresh yourself, an unofficial meditation spot or a comfortable pillow and favorite picture or statue for yoga. When you travel, take along items that will help you enjoy a few precious moments of relaxation away from home. I always take bottled water, a book of inspirational writing and my CD player or iPod with At Peace acoustic, instrumental music for relaxation. This way, I can set up my own "relaxation station" wherever I happen to be.

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