

## Q and A: Holiday stress and mindfulness

December 12 2022, by Cynthia Weiss

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The holiday season is always stressful for me. I get overwhelmed with the hustle and bustle, especially shopping for gifts and juggling the different traditions our interfaith family keeps. Do you have any suggestions for how to make the holidays less challenging?

ANSWER: The end-of-year [holiday season](#) means different things to different people. Family and [religious traditions](#) are observed in various ways, and the meals and the extra activities can lead to a lot of stress.

For many people, much of the focus tends to be on [gift-giving](#). Gifts are a wonderful way to show love, appreciation and gratitude, but not everyone needs a gift in the traditional sense.

Gifts can take on many different tones, but most people tend to think about [gifts](#) as something that is purchased—a item wrapped with ribbon and paper to be opened and enjoyed.

But making a meaningful connection or having a deeper conversation with someone also can be a gift. Take [time](#) to pause and think about what is important, as that can probably provide a [greater value](#). Sometimes the more meaningful gifts are the things we give from the heart—actions or activities we can do with people we care about.

One idea is to go back to that childhood concept of giving coupons. For instance, give a parent, sibling or friend the gift of time and assistance: "I'll help you with this hardware project" or "I'll help you clean out the garage this spring."

When considering the gifts you want to give, take a moment to think about your intentions. Are you accomplishing what you want? Ask yourself if you are being authentic with the way you communicate with other people. Are you buying a gift because you feel like you must, or are you buying a gift that truly reflects how you feel about the person?

Additionally, amid putting value on giving to and doing for others, it is also important to think about yourself. You mentioned feeling stressed and overwhelmed with the chaos of the holidays. Consider asking others to tackle certain tasks if you can.

Also, it is important to take time for yourself during this season. If you're feeling frustrated, short on time or impatient, it will be helpful to try to reduce your stress and take some time for yourself. Often people think of [self-care](#) as always going out and doing something, like getting their nails done or going to the gym. But sometimes focusing on self-care is about mindfulness—pausing, being quiet at your desk or in bed, breathing, shutting your eyes, and giving yourself permission to slow down and not think about all the other things that are competing for attention.

You also can consider some other ways to reduce stress, including:

- Spending time with a four-legged friend. It's no secret that pets make us happy. Their love is unconditional, they are always happy to see us and they're adorable. Spend some quality time with a pet. Or volunteer at an animal shelter if you don't have pets of your own.
- Grabbing a book. Reading is a great way to wind down. Like coloring, it helps you lose yourself in the moment and forget about your work or other stressors.
- Massaging your pressure points. Any massage can be relaxing, but massaging the pressure points in your body, especially the earlobes, brings on a calming, relaxing sensation over your body. Do this for a few minutes, and you may start to feel some relief.
- Busting a move. Breaking out your best dance moves along with your favorite song can be therapeutic for many people. If you're dancing throughout most of the song, you also can say you snuck in some exercise.
- Taking a deep breath. Deep breathing is a great way to reduce your body's response to perceived threats. Breathe in through your nose for five seconds and hold for two seconds. Then release your breath through your mouth for five seconds.

As you navigate your end-of-year calendar, social activities are a big part of expectations. One of the biggest challenges this time of year is staying mindful of a [healthy diet](#), keeping portion size reasonable, and limiting fatty foods and alcohol. While it can be tempting to take advantage of a few glasses of wine or other beverages, alcohol can raise your risk for heart issues, especially if you happen to be at risk.

Travel and schedule changes also can be challenging, so ask yourself what you may be able to say no to during the holidays. For some people, the holidays can be sad and stressful. If that is your situation, try to give yourself a break. Plan and do what feels reasonable. Sometimes self-care is giving yourself permission to stay at home.

Certainly, the holidays are a high-risk time for many people. Pay attention to your body. If you have symptoms of illness, feel despair or increased depression, don't hesitate to seek out professional guidance.

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