

## **Top 12 Stress Busters for the Festive Season**

**By Carole Spiers**

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The festive season can be a stressful time for many different reasons. The shops are crowded, the weather is far from its best, and shortening days and lengthening nights make us feel as though we're constantly running to keep up with the demands placed upon us.

Then of course there's the drain on our bodies and financial resources created by excessive and unnecessary buying and the party season. December can become an 'endurance test', where one office party or social gathering follows another in an endless cycle of late nights and subsequent hangovers. It's therefore hardly surprising that worrying about Christmas can have an adverse effect on our health. Stress and anxiety are well known for their ability to depress our immune system, leaving us susceptible to colds and other minor ailments. If you spend lots of time out shopping and socialising you're likely to come into contact with more people who are carrying infections. Add to this the change in diet resulting from eating too many rich or fatty foods, too much alcohol and too little exercise, and it's easy to see why Christmas is a time when you really need to make that extra effort to look after yourself!

The festivities can be difficult for those who are single, married, lonely, sick or bereaved, but also for those who are ostensibly happy. They remind us of the passing of another year – the relentless marching of the seasons of our lives. Even if we have a partner we can be lonely or unhappy, and these feelings can become magnified - putting pressure on already strained relationships. Many can start to break up either during or immediately after the holidays.

The secret of surviving the festive season is knowing that we are all vulnerable, we all have disappointments, and it really is true that there are many who are perhaps less fortunate than ourselves.

These perspectives are important, because they bring back order to the mind. Order and understanding keep us mentally on a more even keel, ready and able to ride with the waves rather than sailing into them. The festive season is, after all, a time for celebration. How sad then that we often find it so difficult to celebrate ourselves.

### **Top 12 Festive Season Stress Busters**

1. Plan the festive season well in advance.
2. Try not to leave everything to the last moment. The holiday should be fun – not a trial.
3. Make a list of gifts you want to buy, and get the satisfaction of ticking them off as you go. Be sensible with your presents and don't get carried away.
4. Wrap the presents as you buy them, rather than leaving them all until the last minute
5. If you hate all the bustle and queuing, try shopping out of hours when shops are open late, or take advantage of the opportunities for shopping via the internet. Focus on the pleasure your gifts will bring, rather than the hassle of buying them.

6. Make some time for yourself over the holiday. Read a book you've been meaning to read, or buy a relaxation tape, switch off from the festive atmosphere and think about your body and mind.
7. Make time for other people. Visit an elderly relative or the person next door, track down a long-lost friend, or give up some time to help a charity or your local community. They will benefit – and so will you.
8. If you're feeling lonely, make a phone call to a friend or even someone you don't know (such as the Samaritans who are on call 24 hours a day).
9. Don't magnify your problems by thinking that everyone else is having a better time than you are. The chances are they are not!
10. With the pressures of the materialistic society, remember that the best things in life are free. The scent of frost on a December morning ... the smoke from a log fire ... a walk in the park as the light fails ...
11. Cherish the time for reconnecting with your family and friends.
12. At least once a day, think about all the good things in your life, instead of the 'not so good'. Hold that thought for the day and you may even catch yourself smiling!

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