

# Surviving the Stressful Silly Season

*How to work through the maze of the Christmas  
and Holiday season with minimal stress and anxiety.*



### **Tips for Managing Stress**

Plan ahead. By being organised you will minimise stress and anxiety and avoid blowing your budget (or your top). Spread tasks over a longer period of time rather than leaving things to the last minute. A little task done each day is less stressful and more doable than attacking a mountain of responsibilities in the last few days. Make a 'TO DO' list and prioritise, doing the most important items first.

Take charge of your Christmas. If celebrating Christmas is really about joy then Christmas does not always have to be done the way it has always been done. Talk with your family about a way of celebrating that is both realistic and able to be achieved. For example, arrange for a buffet-style meal, where each person brings something to contribute.

Share the workload and even the planning by asking family members to help. Delegate responsibility. Don't be afraid to ask for support. Encourage a team spirit in cleaning up afterward a party.

Learn to say NO to some things – do not over-commit yourself or your budget. Try not to take on any more than you can comfortably handle – based both on last year's experience and the fact that you are all a year older. Limit yourself to only a few parties (or only one) and avoid too many activities around this time. These things put an additional strain on you and your relationships.

Totally avoid or minimise your consumption of alcohol. When we become stressed it is easy for some of us to turn to food, chocolate, alcohol or drugs to cope. These short-term fixes have long-term negative repercussions.

Don't forget the reason for the season – especially the spiritual aspects.

“Christmas is a time to love” yourself! Don't be a martyr. Make time to relax and to rest. Put on your favourite DVD or music CD & pamper yourself. Have a good laugh at least once a day. Make your Christmas special for you! Getting enough sleep and taking care of your body during this time will carry you through the holiday season feeling better not bitter.

### **Tips for Savings & Seasonal Spending**

Plan ahead. As early as you can in the New Year, work out rough budget of expected Christmas costs. Prepare an approximate budget and keep within it. Include gifts, food, decorations, cards (don't forget the cost of postage stamps and overseas telephone charges) etc. Calculate how much disposable income you have between now and Christmas. A certain percentage of this can be dedicated each week (or fortnight or month) to covering your expected Christmas costs. Don't be discouraged if the amount seems small. If you save \$5.00, \$10.00 or \$20.00 per

week over a year, it can provide you with a hefty nest egg.

If your nest egg isn't enough to cover your estimated expenses, perhaps you may need to refigure your Christmas budget to a more realistic amount.

If you have trouble keeping your hands off your Christmas nest egg, consider opening a 'Christmas Club' account.

A 'Christmas Club' account is sometimes called a 'Kris Kringle' account named after a movie character by that name. In some circles the term Kris Kringle refers to the gambling game of Kris Kringle, where each family member draws a name out of a hat and then pool funds together to buy a present only for the winning person.

Take advantage of sales throughout the year to buy & store gifts for birthdays & Christmas.

Share the load. If you are on a strict budget, invite family members to bring food and beverages for a party rather than expecting that you will supply it all.

Avoid the use of credit cards that can painfully eat into your household budget throughout the coming year.

Write up a Christmas card list. Keep it in a safe place so that you can refer to it and add to it (or delete names from it) year after year.

Home-made cards or cards purchased in January in the post-Christmas sale for use in the following Christmas will mean that the greatest expense will only be the postage. Put the cards in a safe place so they don't get lost (or discarded - pun intended) during the year.

Take advantage of cheaper postage rates for 'card only' mailings as soon as it becomes available each year. Plan to write your Christmas cards in early December or at the end of November. Book a date in your diary so you don't forget. Posting early avoids stress, especially for overseas mailing.

Based on your budget, set a dollar limit on the cost of a gift for each family member or friend. Only shop with a list. Maybe consider making home-made gift vouchers offering services such as an evening's baby-sitting, a few lawn-mowing sessions, help with household chores, etc. Or agree among family members that each will buy or make presents only for the children.

Re-use wrapping paper or make your own with poster-paints and plain paper. Consider home-made gifts such as jams or sweet-jars.

Grow a plant as a gift. This takes planning ahead, but potted plants such as Strawberries or Poinsettia make wonderful gifts at Christmas. (Normally a Poinsettia will flower in July or August so it may take extra skill to make it bloom at Christmas - but the result is well worth the effort.)

### **Tips for Maintaining Healthy Relationships**

Try to accept your friends and relatives just as they are, even lowering your expectations (or making them more realistic) if necessary.

If relatives are staying with you, allow them some privacy and take time for yourself to be alone sometimes.

Choose positive people to spend your time with and to talk to. If possible avoid those who make you feel uncomfortable.

Fill your communication with happiness not 'hot topics' and steer conversations away from confrontations. Save the conflict topics for another time. Doing fun things together (outdoor games, Scrabble®, etc) may help to keep conversations away from difficult topics.

If you gossip – people will also gossip about you!

Loneliness at Christmas is intensified, so if you are alone, get up and mix with others. Find people who understand your circumstances and can be supportive. Consider the support of a spiritual or faith community. Check with your local council for free or low-cost community Christmas get-togethers & meals. Search the newspapers for tours of Christmas Lights Displays or Carols-by-Candlelight programs. Seek out others who may be lonely and pay them a visit.

Remember people who have lost a loved-one during the year. They will be grieving with intensity at times such as Christmas and anniversaries, so remember them in prayer and perhaps with a visit or telephone call.

Have a Happy Christmas & a Safe New Year.



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