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A Simple Approach for Less Holiday Stress

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I recently read an article in The New York Times about people who were taking solo trips over the holidays to far-flung places where they had remarkable experiences. Interestingly, travel experts report a surge in these kinds of solo trips. This started me thinking about framing the holidays in a simpler way to reduce stress. No matter whether it is just for you or for your big group of friends or for the extended family, maybe we can ease some holiday stress by stepping back and making a point to do things in a simpler way.

The holiday season is known for all the hustle and bustle which can lead to it feeling more overwhelming than joyous: advertising starting in October; gift shopping; party planning; end-of-year responsibilities. The season's charm can be overshadowed by stress and busyness, but what if we took a simpler approach this year? By shifting our focus to meaningful moments and prioritizing self-care, we could create a holiday season that feels more fulfilling and grounded. Reframing the holidays this way offers an opportunity to find more connection, joy, and peace.

The Art of a Simple Holiday

A simple holiday season starts with the decision to let go of the "shoulds" and focus instead on what matters most. Rather than filling your calendar with countless activities or shopping lists, consider what truly brings joy to you and the people you love. This shift allows for more intentional choices that honor your needs, energy, and values. A simplified holiday can mean fewer but more meaningful gatherings, fewer but thoughtfully chosen gifts, and setting aside time to pause and be present with yourself and with others.

Choosing a simpler holiday also means embracing the idea that not everything (or everyone) must be perfect. The beauty of the season doesn't come from elaborate decorations, fancy celebrations, or perfectly wrapped gifts, but from the authentic moments you share and remember. By giving yourself permission to let go of perfection, you allow room for genuine connection and joy. A simple approach can feel freeing; it reduces pressure and fosters an environment where it's easier to find comfort, contentment, and peace.

For instance, rather than hosting a large party, you might choose to have a cozy gathering with a few close friends or family members, prioritizing quality time over a lengthy guest list. Or, perhaps instead of shopping for dozens of gifts, you decide to give a few thoughtful items, create hand-made gifts, or even consider experience-based presents that create lasting memories. These small changes can reduce holiday stress and, more importantly, allow you to feel more connected to the season's true spirit.



Meaningful Moments

Meaningful moments are the heartbeat of the holiday season. Taking time to be present and savor these experiences helps counterbalance the rush of activities. Often, these moments are simple — a quiet morning with a cup of hot cocoa, watching a classic holiday movie, or having a heart-to-heart conversation with a friend. They don't require elaborate planning, yet they carry the power to fill our hearts with joy and contentment.

To cultivate more of these moments, try approaching the holiday season with mindfulness. Pay attention to how you feel during different activities and ask yourself what truly uplifts you. Being mindful helps you identify what brings you joy and lets you prioritize those moments over obligations that may feel draining. For example, if baking cookies with your family fills you with nostalgia and happiness, make it a priority. On the other hand, if certain events feel like more of a chore than a celebration, it's okay to opt out or spend less time on them.

Consider creating a holiday tradition that's all about connecting meaningfully, such as a family game night, a gratitude jar where everyone writes something they're thankful for, or a day spent volunteering together. These traditions aren't focused on spending or extravagant displays; they're about sharing experiences and building connections that will outlast the season. By focusing on moments like these, you'll likely find a deeper sense of fulfillment and joy, with less of the stress and pressure that often accompany traditional holiday expectations.

Self-Care is a Gift to Yourself

Self-care is often overlooked during the holidays, but it's essential for maintaining balance and well-being. The holiday season can be both emotionally and physically demanding, and practicing self-care allows you to show up as your best self. Prioritizing self-care doesn't mean opting out of the holiday spirit; rather, it means nurturing your own well-being so you can fully appreciate and enjoy the season.

A simple self-care routine can start with setting boundaries around your time and energy. When you're clear about your limits, it becomes easier to avoid overcommitting. For instance, if you're someone who tends to take on all the holiday responsibilities, try delegating tasks or asking for help with preparations. Setting boundaries might also mean choosing not to attend every gathering or saying no to activities that feel like too much.

Physical self-care is also crucial. Prioritize rest, eat nourishing foods, and stay hydrated. It's easy to get swept up in the excitement and indulgence of the season, but maintaining a balanced approach to nutrition and sleep will keep you feeling energized. Taking breaks, even if only for a few quiet minutes throughout the day, can help you reset and recharge.



Additionally, practicing emotional self-care can make a significant difference. The holidays can sometimes bring up complex feelings, including grief or loneliness, especially if loved ones are absent. Allow yourself to acknowledge and feel these emotions without judgment. Writing in a journal, reaching out to a friend, or simply giving yourself a moment to breathe deeply can help you process any emotional challenges. Remember, self-care is a way of honoring yourself and is essential for finding peace in the season's chaos.

Cherishing Simplicity and Joy

By simplifying your holiday season, focusing on meaningful moments, and practicing self-care, you can experience a richer, more fulfilling time. The holidays don't have to be a whirlwind of events, gifts, and obligations to be meaningful. By letting go of perfection and embracing what genuinely brings you joy, you create space for moments that feel true to you.

This approach offers a new perspective on the holidays, one where connection, presence, and well-being take center stage. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, you can enter the season with a sense of calm and purpose. This holiday, give yourself the gift of a simpler, more intentional experience — and enjoy a season that feels peaceful, joyful, and meaningful.

Wishing you a joyous holiday season and good wishes for the New Year from the FHE Health and Sunlight Recovery family.

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