

Don't Let Stress Steal Your Joy This Holiday Season

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Many people report increased stress during the holidays due to extra obligations, financial pressure and family drama
- › Practicing relaxation strategies can help relieve stress and help you focus on what really matters during this holiday season
- › Exercise, visualization, meditation, living in the present and proper breathing can all help to make your holidays more relaxing
- › If a certain tradition causes more stress and discomfort than joy, give yourself permission to do things differently

The holidays are supposed to be one of the most joyous times of the year, and surveys show that the majority of Americans do feel positive emotions like happiness, love and high spirits often during this season.¹

On the other hand, emotions of all kinds are increased, and this includes negative feelings like anxiety, grief and stress.

Many people report increased stress during the holidays as they try to pull together the “perfect” holiday for their families, which often means balancing work and social obligations with shopping, decorating, cooking, cleaning, wrapping and baking.

Financial pressures also tend to peak at this time of year, as do worries over having enough money to purchase gifts without running up credit card debt. Even worries

related to work, including wrapping up year-end projects or getting enough time off, run high during the holiday season.

What's the Point of a Holiday Celebration if You Don't Enjoy It?

All of the hype and preparations surrounding the holidays can make it feel like one more “chore” that has to be dealt with. If your holiday morphs into the “chore” category then, really, what's the point?

When you find yourself getting caught up in anxious thoughts about how you'll get everything done, stop and remember that most people say spending time with their family and friends is what they look forward to most about the holidays.² This season should not be about stress – it should be about relaxing and sharing good times with those you love.

Learn to Relax Your Breathing

One of the best, and simplest, ways to calm your nerves when you're feeling tense or anxious is to practice more mindful breathing. Deep breathing activates your parasympathetic nervous system, which induces the relaxation response.

There are many different breathing practices that you can try that are both powerful and very easy to perform. One of my favorites is the 4-7-8 technique I learned when I attended a presentation by Dr. Andrew Weil, who promotes integrative medicine and healthy living.

I recently learned that one of the best breathing practices that exists is playing a didgeridoo. It can help you increase your CO2 levels and improve your health.

In a few weeks I'll have a late Christmas present for you in that I will be releasing my fascinating interview with Dr. Peter Litchfield, who is one of the best breathing experts in world. He will help you understand why almost every breathing practice is fatally flawed as they all fail to address the fundamental reasons for low CO2 levels which stems from

dysfunctional breathing habits. This interview will be life changing for many of you and am really looking forward to it coming out.

It's not important to focus on how much time you spend in each phase of the breathing activity, but rather that you get the ratio correct. Here's how the 4-7-8 technique is done:

1. Sit up straight
2. Place the tip of your tongue up against the back of your front teeth. Keep it there through the entire breathing process
3. Breathe in silently through your nose to the count of four
4. Hold your breath to the count of seven
5. Exhale through your mouth to the count of eight, making an audible "woosh" sound
6. That completes one full breath. Repeat the cycle another three times, for a total of four breaths

You can do this breathing exercise as frequently as you want throughout the day, but it's recommended you don't do more than four full breaths during the first month or so of practice. Later, you may work your way up to eight full breath cycles at a time. The benefits of this simple practice are enormous and work as a natural tranquilizer for your nervous system.

Happy Holidays to You and Yours

This holiday season, I want to thank you for your loyalty and support, and wish you peace, joy and health on this special day.

I'd like to leave you with one final thought – an idea for what to gift those on your holiday shopping list, as quoted by novelist Oren Arnold. The best part? These gifts don't come from a store and they keep on giving all year long.

"Christmas Gift Suggestions:

To your enemy, forgiveness.

To an opponent, tolerance.

To a friend, your heart.

To a customer, service.

To all, charity.

To every child, a good example.

To yourself, respect."

Merry Christmas!

Sources and References

- [1, 2 APA Holiday Stress Report](#)