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Ask a psychotherapist ? holiday anxiety

Question: One year you printed a list of things you could do to make Christmas-time less stressful. It helped me that year but now I've forgotten what you said to do. I'm already feeling the pressure this season and dreading the whole thing. It would really help me if you could print those suggestions again.

Answer: Below are the original 10 tips plus some new ones for managing holiday stress and putting the joy back into the season.

1. One of the greatest stressors of the season for most families is its cost. Consider drawing up a realistic budget of what your family can afford to spend. Then list your ?must-haves? such as turkey and tree and subtract the cost of these from your budget. What's left over after the essentials is what you have to spend on gifts.
2. Consider reducing the number of gifts you give and the number of people you have to buy them for. Some families without young children agree to set a limit of one gift per person within a certain dollar range. Larger families may use the ?secret Santa? method of having each person choose the name of another family member out of a (Santa) hat. In that way, each person buys one gift for a family member and receives one gift from another family member.
3. Make a list of everything to be done to prepare for the holidays and of all the gifts you need to buy.
4. Delegate jobs to other family members; post a list of jobs that need doing, including cleaning, shopping, food preparation, gift buying and wrapping and assign tasks well ahead of time.
5. Shop for gifts early, perhaps even before the season has officially begun.
6. Shop for some or all of your items on-line. They will be delivered either to the post office or directly to your door and some on-line merchants will even gift wrap them for you.
7. Consider giving gifts that don't need to be wrapped such as charitable donations made in someone's name, movie or theatre tickets or a night of babysitting.
8. Get enough sleep: you may need more than your normal amount if you are stressed.
9. Eat properly: because stress makes your immune system work harder, good nutrition is a must. Don't forget to take your vitamins. Consider getting a flu shot early in the season.
10. Pay attention to your energy level: If you are flagging, take a break rather than pressing on.
11. When scheduling holiday events, avoid making back-to-back commitments if possible; a day off in between allows you to re-group and will increase your enjoyment of each event.
12. Be selective when scheduling holiday events: rather than be overwhelmed and enjoy none of them, choose the ones that give you and your family the most joy.
13. Schedule some relaxing time for yourself during the holidays; don't forget that you deserve a holiday too!

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