

Keeping It Simple Over the Holiday Season

As the holiday season approaches, we're often faced with a host of options and choices as to how we will spend our time and our money. Many of us anticipate endless preparations. We may feel obligated to meet unrealistic expectations for gift giving. Or we may try to avoid disappointing anyone by visiting everyone in a short amount of time. You may also be experiencing challenging circumstances, such as an economic downturn or job loss, or not enough time off work to travel to visit loved ones.

There are several ways to get back to the basics and simplify things to make ourselves happier during the upcoming holiday season:

Take care of your needs. Many of us unquestionably follow the traditions we have always held during the holidays or traditions society seems to impose on us—regardless of what is going on in our lives. It is OK to say no and to put you and your immediate family first. You can decline that invitation if you want to!

Consider opting out of the usual "fun celebrations" and use the holidays as a time for reflection. Perhaps your stress has been triggered by a divorce, a career disappointment, or a health problem. You may benefit from some form of spiritual nourishment, such as reading a few meaningful books or spending time in nature.

Realize that you don't have to do everything yourself. If you tend to take on too much work over the holidays, consider whether you can decrease the number of obligations or activities on your plate or who you can ask to help.

Cook the main course and ask the guests to bring the trimmings. Are you the one who prepares the holiday dinner for a large gathering of family and friends? People generally want to help and contribute. Ask each person to bring one dish and share the load!

Spend within your budget. Here are two ideas to help ease the stress of gift giving if you need to be more budget conscious this holiday season:

- **Draw names.** This means that each person buys and receives one gift. In fact, the element of surprise—wondering who drew your name—can make gift giving more fun. It's important, however, that everyone plays by the rules. Make sure you have agreed if there is a limit to the cost of the gift and resist the urge to spend more!
- **Agree on spending limits for gifts.** Talk with those in your life with whom you exchange gifts well in advance. Explain your need to limit holiday spending, and you may well be pleasantly surprised if they express relief because they are feeling the same way.

Prioritize your recovery. Holiday parties can be especially difficult for those recovering from addiction or eating difficulties. If you think you may struggle to stay on track with your goals when it comes to healthy eating or substance use, it is OK to decline an invitation.

Help others. Giving time, affection, and care to others, especially those in need, is the most rewarding experience of all. Whether you serve at a soup kitchen, reach out to an older relative, or help at a local charitable organization, helping others can often help people keep their minds off their own troubles and provide a sense of purpose.

Recognize when holiday rituals become a burden, not a pleasure. Realize that times have changed and that a past ritual may no longer fit your family's wants or needs. Avoid forcing something that has become tedious for yourself or others and be open to creating new traditions that you and your family can enjoy.

Focus on what you enjoy about the holiday season. You don't have to like everything about the holidays, but there may be some parts of it that you do enjoy or find meaningful. Perhaps you love seeing all the lights and decorations that line storefronts and homes or relish the chance to have a break from your regular routine. Make the holidays your own by embracing what brings you a sense of wellbeing and peace.

Be realistic. Life isn't perfect. And seldom are holiday celebrations like the glossy photographs we see in advertisements or social media this time of year. Focusing on impossible expectations usually results in disappointment and unhappiness, so accept what is, and try to let go of expectations that don't serve you.

With some creativity and compassion (including to yourself!), you can reclaim a sense of joy and meaning in the holiday season.

© TELUS Health 2025



Jana Crawford, MA, MSW, RSW

Registered Social Worker, Senior Clinical Content Specialist