

Wishing You a Season of Serenity

If cooking the Thanksgiving turkey throws you into a tizzy, your ears start ringing when you hear Jingle Bells on the radio, stringing Christmas lights leaves you strung out, you get analysis paralysis over finding the perfect holiday gift or you break into a cold sweat over the thought of another family gathering with your quirky Aunt Sally, then heed some advice from Bobby McFerrin and "Don't Worry, Be Happy" this season.

For many, the holidays often add many more tasks to already jam-packed schedules. Gift shopping, family gatherings and traveling piled on top of work demands can make anyone irritable and flustered during the holiday season. Not immune to the holiday season stress myself, I sought out some tips on how best to keep your cool when your stress level shoots up like a bottle rocket.

First of all, acknowledge your feelings. If you feel down, you are not alone; many people feel down during the holidays. Realize that it is ok to feel sadness or grief if someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones. Allow yourself to cry and express your feelings. Reach out if you need some company, seek out community or social events or lift your spirits by volunteering your time to help others.

Be realistic. Don't worry about how you think things should be. Nobody is perfect and the holidays don't have to be that way. Accept your family for their uniqueness and differences and just enjoy the time spent together. As families grow and change, traditions will change as well. Hold on to special memories in your heart and be open to creating some new holiday rituals.

Try a new tradition. If it's the usual family get-together that makes you stress, try something new. If the thought of hosting the family dinner throws you into a state of panic, discuss options with other family members. Maybe a sibling would enjoy hosting instead or could split the responsibility with you. If you feel that you want your family to focus on the importance of giving during the holiday, suggest donating to a charity or adopting a family through the United Way to help support someone in need.

Plan a budget and stick to it. Before you begin your holiday shopping, plan a reasonable budget and stick to it. Decide how much you can realistically afford to spend on food and gifts. If most holiday shopping excursions leave your pocketbook bare, then try making homemade gifts instead. The local library and websites such as Pinterest offer an array of ideas. If you still enjoy buying gifts and have a large family, suggest a gift exchange, drawing names for a family member to purchase a gift for. This often makes that gift more meaningful and more thought out.

Plan ahead. Once Halloween is over, the store shelves are crammed with Christmas décor and the holidays are here before you can blink. It's hard to find time to fit in everything on

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