

“Help me survive the holidays!”

For many people, this season is both wonderful *and* maddening. Here, simple ways to soothe ‘festive stress’ so you can truly enjoy all the fun

Release worry Remember to exhale

You’re juggling to-do’s and can barely catch your breath. “To melt stress, recall a time when you felt strong and breathe into that moment,” says expert Jennifer Shannon. “Then imagine your frazzled self sitting across from you—exhale and picture your breath giving her what she needs, like acceptance and compassion.” This visualization trick puts distance between you and worry.

Ditch comparisons

From “perfect” holiday cards to social media posts, it’s easy to feel envy, says expert Shonda Moralis. “When I see a woman walking her dog while I’m rushing to work, I feel it,” she admits. To end the comparison trap, let FOMO (fear of missing out) uncover what you want. “Comparing myself to

my neighbor with her dog told me I craved time for me, so I took 15 minutes a day to walk. Instead of judging yourself, listen to what envy is telling you.”

Allow all your emotions

The holidays crystallize joy and grief in equal measure, and that’s okay, says Moralis. “Allow space for all your emotions by living in the ‘and’: joy *and* sadness.” As an example, she shares that her father passed away in January. “I can grieve and make a shift to what’s beautiful about the season: My daughter was born on Christmas day, and she’s back from abroad to visit.” To shift toward joy, create a new ritual, be it telling stories about a loved one or cooking their favorite recipe. “Trust that you *can* feel it all without getting swept away.”



Embrace ‘less’ Give yourself credit

Instead of holding yourself to an impossible standard, reward your flexibility, urges Shannon. “Ask yourself, *How resilient was I?*” she says. “If, for example, holiday dinner wasn’t ready when you planned, and to kill time you played charades with your family, pat yourself on the back for being spontaneous.” This reframing opens your eyes to how adaptable you really are.

Savor joyful moments

Jot down an “un-to-do list,” encourages Shannon. “I have a client who wanted to bake her daughter’s favorite Christmas cookies, but she was exhausted.” Shannon asked her what her daughter loved most about the cookies, and it wasn’t the buttery

goodness, but the *love* they symbolized. “Once she realized that, she gave herself permission to buy cookies,” says Shannon. “This way, she had energy to be present with her daughter.” Letting go of doing more opens the door to true connection.

Take four for your SELF

The one thing that *should* be on your to-do list is self-care. “Just remember SELF: serenity, exercise, love, food,” says expert Kathleen Hall, Ph.D., who sets a timer to go off four times a day to honor each part of SELF. “For serenity, I may simply gaze outside; for exercise, I’ll do a few stretches; for love, I’ll text my daughter; and for food, I might grab a gingerbread cookie.” Prioritizing self is as easy as that, during the holidays and beyond.

Our expert panel



Jennifer Shannon, LMFT, author of *Don’t Feed the Monkey Mind*, is a psychotherapist specializing in anxiety. More at JenniferShannon.com.



Shonda Moralis, MSW, LCSW, author of *Breathe, Empower, Achieve: 5-Minute Mindfulness for Women Who Do It All*, is a women’s impact coach.



Kathleen Hall, Ph.D., author of four books, including *Mindful Living Everyday*, is the founder and CEO of Mindful Living Network® and The Stress Institute.