

Avoid Holiday Overload

Don't deny yourself the joys of the holiday season

THE HOLIDAYS CAN BE A time of great joy or a time of stress and frustration. During this overly commercialized time of the year, we are bombarded daily with idealized images that give us unrealistic expectations for our own holiday celebrations. Here are five ways to help you avoid holiday overload and truly enjoy the holiday season.

Don't Overextend

No one can do everything, so plan to enjoy a few special activities rather than commit to too much. "Doing it all" is an impractical goal that only serves to frazzle and stress us out. Share shopping, cooking, and cleaning responsibilities with others. People generally appreciate the opportunity to participate. When you feel overwhelmed, stop and remind yourself of all the things you do well.

Don't Overeat

Go ahead and enjoy the foods you love, but avoid large portions. You'll feel less sluggish and tired from rapid weight gain. Politely turn down extra food as often as you need to. A smile and a "Thanks, I'm fine," should do.



Focus on maintaining your present weight instead of trying to lose weight in the face of holiday temptations. Weigh yourself each morning to give yourself a "reality check." If you gain a pound, cut back a bit and get some extra exercise. It's easier to lose one pound now than five or ten later.

Don't Overindulge

Keep alcohol to a minimum over the holidays. Too much alcohol takes its toll on our physical and emotional health, as well as on our families. Doctors recommend keeping it to two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women.

Remember, don't drink and drive—and don't ride with a driver who's been drinking. Accidents increase during this time of year, due in large part to drunk driving.

Don't Overspend

Our generosity when holiday shopping can lead us to "impulse buying" and "going all out" with credit cards. Then we experience the "post holiday blues" when the bills arrive in January. If you must use a credit card, charge only what you can pay off on your next statement.

Develop a holiday budget that is based on what you can afford. Stick to that budget.

Don't fall for the materialistic message that expensive gifts are a sign of love and caring. Remind yourself that it's possible to have memorable holiday experiences without spending a lot. Consider giving the gift of time or friendship rather than presents.

Don't Overlook

Remember those less fortunate during the holiday season and consider volunteering to help. Spread holiday cheer by taking your age appropriate family members with you and volunteer at a soup kitchen, visit the elderly, donate toys/clothes, or become a bell ringer for the Salvation Army. Sharing the true spirit of the season brings immeasurable rewards.

Amid all the festivities, don't forget your own needs. Give yourself at least a half-hour a day to relax, reflect, and cherish the memories of holidays gone by. It will help you put this year's plans into perspective and resist those urges to overdo. Put joy ahead of stress and make it your best holiday season yet! ♦