

7 Habits for a Happy, Healthy Holiday Season

By Melissa Eisler



The holidays are a wonderful time of year with joy, cheer, and gratitude in abundance. Everywhere you look, people seem to be in high spirits: being kind to one another, taking time to pause and reflect, and taking care of those less fortunate.

On the flip side, the holidays can also become a source of overwhelm with work parties, buying gifts, and family commitments—and, of course, the endless barrage of homemade cookies, tinned popcorn, and casseroles that you *should* avoid.

It's easy to become overwhelmed and unhappy with yourself during the holidays, but it doesn't have to be this way. Make a commitment to take care of yourself this holiday season. Here are seven ways to beat the holiday stress and be the best version of yourself through the new year.

1. Enjoy, But Sparingly

There's nothing better than Aunt Merna's homemade chocolate chip cookies right out of the oven, especially when you're surrounded by family, flowing eggnog, and holiday cheer. But instead of sitting down and eating the whole batch in one sitting, be mindful and start with just one. Then, move away from the cookies and enjoy a nice cup of tea or big glass of water. You'll

trick your stomach into thinking you're full. And then you won't feel guilty when you reach for a second later in the day or tomorrow.

It's unrealistic to avoid treats during the holidays, so instead, be mindful of when and how much you enjoy, and you'll be able to *truly enjoy*—without the guilt.

2. Exercise Regularly

It's no secret that you feel better when you've pushed your body physically and released endorphins. Not only will you feel less guilty about trying Sally's casserole at the work potluck, you'll also be a happier version of yourself with family and friends.

The hectic holiday schedule can often derail your normal exercise routine. If you already have a routine that works for you, make a point to sticking with it, no matter how busy the holiday season gets. If you don't already exercise regularly, now's the best time to figure out a routine that works for you and make it a habit.

You can also pair physical exercise with your social calendar. When you start to feel stressed or overwhelmed, try one of these active ideas to get your endorphins pumping and your mind and body in a better place:

- Go to your favorite yoga class
- Call a friend and go for a run
- Lift weights in the gym
- Walk around the neighborhood with your spouse or a neighbor
- Plan a ski day with a coworker
- Explore a new part of the city on your bike

3. Try Meditating

Whether you're a seasoned pro or just starting out, meditation can help center and ground you during the holiday season. Before your day begins, take 5-30 minutes to reconnect to your mind, body, and soul. If you're feeling overwhelmed in the middle of your day, find a quiet place to sit and be present—even two minutes will do the trick.

If you're new to meditation, try a class—in-person or online—designed for beginners. [*The Chopra Center's Beginner's Guide to Meditation*](#) is free, and you can move through it at your own pace. You can even challenge other family members and friends to sign up with you. You might be surprised by the lasting effects and connection you feel with them when you learn to meditate together.

4. Do Something Special for Yourself

As you're running from one thing to the next, it can be easy to forget that in order to care well for others, you need to take care of yourself first. Treat yourself to something special this holiday season, honoring who you are and showing that you are worth your own time and energy.

Try one of these kind gestures to yourself in the midst of the rush:

- Stop and buy yourself a favorite coffee or tea in the middle of errands
- Get home an hour early and enjoy a cup of tea or hot cocoa by a fire
- Try a fun, new restaurant alone or with a close friend
- Turn off your phone for an entire morning or afternoon (let your loved ones know ahead of time)
- Explore a holiday flea market for fun gift ideas
- Schedule a massage
- Get a pedicure
- Take a yoga or meditation workshop

5. Start a Gift Exchange

The holidays can mean spending lots of money on gifts for family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. Instead of buying everyone a gift, organize a White Elephant or Secret Santa party with certain groups of people. It takes away the stress of spending so much money and encourages creativity and fun (especially if you have a spending limit or specific theme).

If you're having trouble thinking of unique gift ideas, try these:

- Yoga class pass
- Magazine subscription
- Jelly-of-the-month club
- Succulents (or other plants that require little maintenance)
- Concert tickets
- Museum entrance fee
- Local art
- Lottery tickets
- DIY gifts, like candles, granola, or potpourri
- Winery tour
- Cooking class

6. Keep It Light

With being around family, having unmet expectations, and remembering loved ones lost, it's common for depression to sneak in during the holidays. They rarely turn out how you want them to—your family will not resemble the perfect Hallmark card, your pies will burn, and there's nothing that will quite fill the void of not having your mom, Grandpa Frank, or Auntie Lisa around. This holiday season, learn to practice *acceptance* and *laughter*.

Acknowledge your feelings and then find ways to lighten up the mood, enjoy the time you have with those around you, and practice laughter as medicine. Here are some ways to invite more laughter and lightness into your holiday season:

- Watch a funny movie
- Listen to your favorite comedian
- Buy tickets to an improv comedy show
- Practice [laughter yoga](#)
- Spend time with friends who make you laugh
- Tell jokes and encourage others to do the same

7. Take Time to Reflect

Before the new year rolls around, spend time reflecting and remembering all that has happened this past year and acknowledge where you are now. Set your calendar and to-do list aside and honor your journey with a session of journaling or talking with a trusted friend. Too often the holidays can go by in a blur—ensure they don't by respecting the past, honoring the present, and summoning the future.

Try answering these questions:

- What have I accomplished this year?
- Who has meant the most to me during the good and bad times?
- Where do I find my strength?
- Who has pleasantly surprised me this year?
- What was my biggest lesson learned this year?
- What am I feeling right now?
- Is my life aligned with my values?
- What's one thing I want to change for next year?

By incorporating just a few of these practices, you can open up the door to a happier, healthier holiday season. The holidays are a time for connection, cheer, and camaraderie. If you take care of yourself, you'll not only enjoy the season more thoroughly, but you'll also make the holiday season sweeter for those around you.