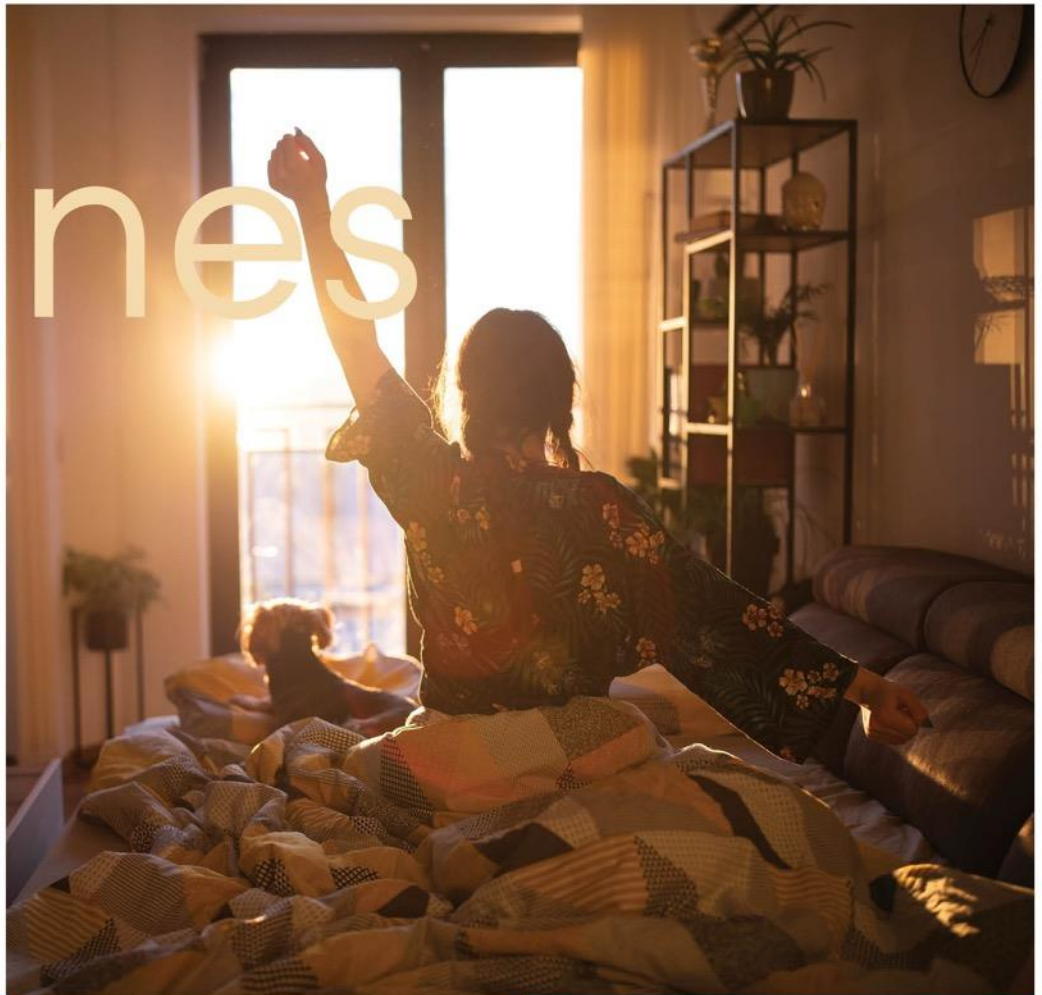


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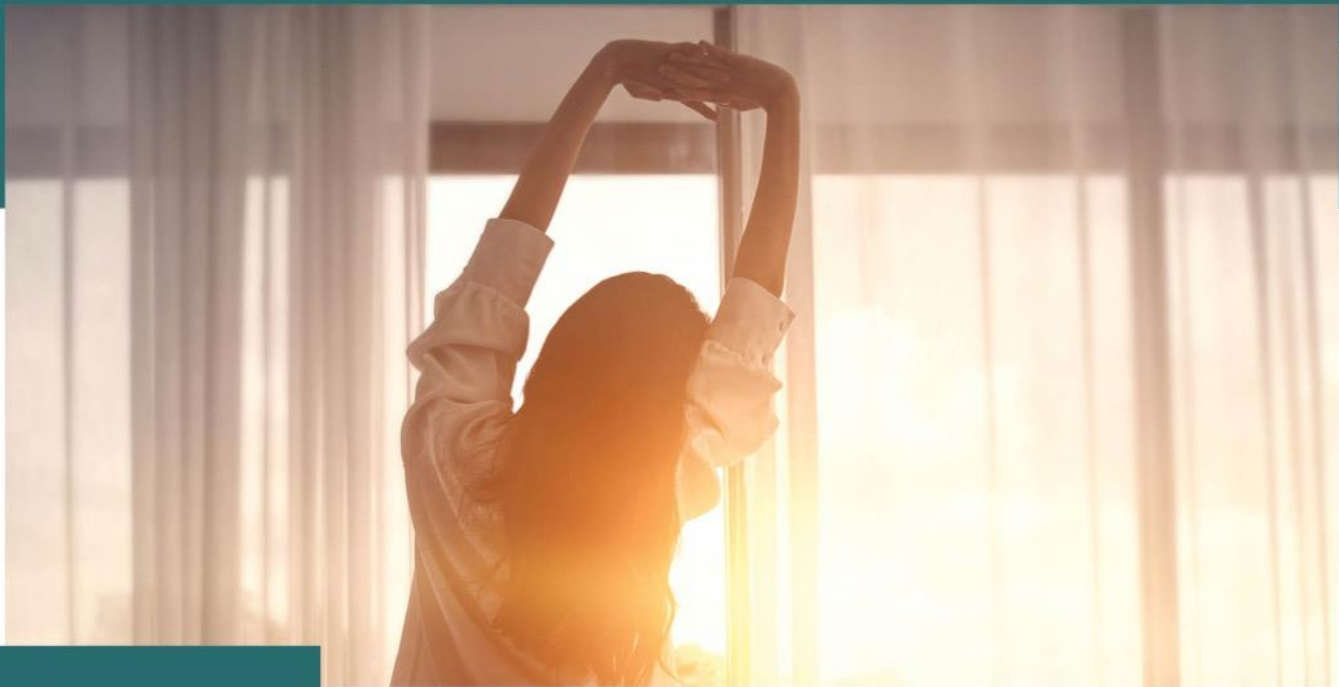
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MAKE THE HOLIDAYS YOUR OWN

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GOOD SLEEP FOR GOOD HEALTH: GET THE REST YOU NEED



Sometimes, the pace of modern life barely gives you time to stop and rest. It can make getting a good night's sleep on a regular basis seem like a dream.

However, sleep is as important for good health as diet and exercise. Good sleep improves your brain performance, mood and health. Not getting enough quality sleep regularly raises the risk of many diseases and disorders. These range from heart disease and stroke to obesity and dementia.

There's more to good sleep than just the hours spent in bed, says Dr. Marishka Brown, a sleep expert at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). 'Healthy sleep encompasses three major things', she explains. 'One is how much sleep you get. Another is sleep quality – that you get uninterrupted and refreshing sleep. The last is a consistent sleep schedule.'

People who work the night shift or irregular schedules may find getting quality sleep extra challenging. Times of great stress – like the COVID-19 pandemic – can

disrupt normal sleep routines. However, there are many things you can do to improve your sleep

Sleep for Repair

Why do people need to sleep? People often think that sleep is just "down time," when a tired brain gets to rest, says Dr. Maiken Nedergaard, who studies sleep at the University of Rochester. "But that's wrong," she says. While you sleep, your brain is working. For example, sleep helps prepare your brain to learn, remember, and create.

Nedergaard and her colleagues discovered that the brain has a drainage system that removes toxins during sleep. "When we sleep, the brain totally changes function," she explains. "It becomes almost like a kidney, removing waste from the system."¹

Her team found in mice that the drainage system removes some of the proteins linked with Alzheimer's disease. These toxins were removed twice as fast from the brain during sleep.

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GOOD SLEEP FOR GOOD HEALTH: GET THE REST YOU NEED



Continued

Everything from blood vessels to the immune system uses sleep as a time for repair, says Dr. Kenneth Wright, Jr., a sleep researcher at the University of Colorado. "There are certain repair processes that occur in the body mostly, or most effectively, during sleep," he explains. "If you don't get enough sleep, those processes are going to be disturbed."

Sleep Myths and Truths

How much sleep you need changes with age. Experts recommend school-age children get at least nine hours a night and teenagers get between eight and 10. Most adults need at least seven hours or more of sleep each night.

There are many misunderstandings about sleep. One is that adults need less sleep as they get older. This isn't true. Older adults still need the same amount, but sleep quality can get worse as you age. Older adults are also more likely to take medications that interfere with sleep.

Another sleep myth is that you can "catch up" on your days off. Researchers are finding that this largely isn't the case. "If you have one bad night's sleep and take a nap, or sleep longer the next night, that can benefit you," says Wright. "But if you have a week's worth of getting too little sleep, the weekend isn't sufficient for you to catch up. That's not a healthy behavior."

In a recent study, Wright and his team looked at people with consistently deficient sleep. They compared them to sleep-deprived people who got to sleep in on the weekend. Both groups of people gained weight with lack of sleep. Their bodies' ability to control blood sugar levels also got worse. The weekend catch-up sleep didn't help.²

On the flip side, more sleep isn't always better, says Brown. For adults, "if you're sleeping more than nine hours a night and you still don't feel refreshed, there may be some underlying medical issue," she explains.

On the flip side, more sleep isn't always better, says Brown. For adults, "if you're sleeping more than nine hours a night and you still don't feel refreshed, there may be some underlying medical issue," she explains.

Sleep Disorders

Some people have conditions that prevent them from getting enough quality sleep, no matter how hard they try. These problems are called *sleep disorders*.

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GOOD SLEEP FOR GOOD HEALTH: GET THE REST YOU NEED



Continued

The most common sleep disorder is *insomnia*. "Insomnia is when you have repeated difficulty getting to sleep and/or staying asleep," says Brown. This happens despite having the time to sleep and a proper sleep environment. It can make you feel tired or unrested during the day.

Insomnia can be short term, where people struggle to sleep for a few weeks or months. "Quite a few more people have been experiencing this during the pandemic," Brown says. Long-term insomnia lasts for three months or longer.

Sleep apnea is another common sleep disorder. In sleep apnea, the upper airway becomes blocked during sleep. This reduces or stops airflow, which wakes people up during the night. The condition can be dangerous. If untreated, it may lead to other health problems.

If you regularly have problems sleeping, talk with your health care provider. They may have you keep a sleep diary to track your sleep for several weeks. They can also run tests, including sleep studies. These look for sleep disorders.

Getting Better Sleep

If you're having trouble sleeping, hearing how important it is may be frustrating. However, simple things can improve your odds of a good night's sleep. (See the tips below to sleep better every day.)

Treatments are available for many common sleep disorders. Cognitive behavioral therapy can help many people with insomnia get better sleep. Medications can also help some people.

Many people with sleep apnea benefit from using a device called a *continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine*. These machines keep the airway open so that you can breathe. Other treatments can include special mouthguards and lifestyle changes.

For everyone, "as best you can, try to make sleep a priority," Brown says. "Sleep is not a throwaway thing—it's a biological necessity."

Getting a Better Night's Sleep

- Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.
- Get some exercise every day, but not close to bedtime.
- Go outside. Try to get natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes every day.
- Avoid nicotine and caffeine. Both are stimulants that keep you awake. Caffeine can take six to eight hours to wear off completely.
- Don't take naps after midafternoon, and keep them short.

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GOOD SLEEP FOR GOOD HEALTH: GET THE REST YOU NEED



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- Avoid alcohol and large meals before bedtime. Both can prevent deep, restorative sleep.
- Limit electronics before bed. Try reading a book, listening to soothing music, or another relaxing activity instead.
- Create a good sleeping environment. Keep the temperature cool if possible. Get rid of sound and light distractions. Make it dark. Silence your cell phone.
- Don't lie in bed awake. If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy again.
- See your health care provider if nothing you try helps. They can determine if you need further testing. They can also help you learn new ways to manage stress.

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HOW TO BE HAPPY



Ten Tips from the Science of Happiness

Behavioral scientists have done a lot of research into what makes people happy and what doesn't. It turns out that most people are quite bad at predicting what will make them happy. Wealth and possessions, for example, have far less impact on happiness than is commonly believed. For deeper, longer-term happiness, scientists have found that other things are far more important. These include some habits for living that can be learned and practiced. Most cost nothing and are available to virtually everyone.

Here are some lessons from the science of happiness that you can apply to your life. (One caveat: For people with clinical depression, anxiety disorder, or other mental health issues, these practices aren't a substitute for therapy, medication, and other professional support. They may be helpful as supplements to those treatments.)

1. Make time for friends and family.

Multiple studies have found that long-term, caring social connections are the biggest factor driving personal happiness. Friends and family support you when you need a lift, act as a sounding board when you need to process your feelings, and celebrate with you when things are good. And it can feel good to provide that support and emotional uplift in return. This isn't about how many social media friends you have. It's about that core set of meaningful

relationships—maybe just one or two people—who love you for who you are and make you feel good. Think about the people who make you laugh and smile and who have been there for you when you've felt down. Make time for them, no matter how busy you are. Show them that you appreciate and care about them.

The flip side of this advice is to let go of grudges. Even the best relationships can hit rocky spots. Don't get stuck there. Harboring resentment takes energy and saps happiness. Reach out to forgive and move on.

2. Be kind and generous.

You've probably seen the bumper sticker: "Perform random acts of kindness." It sounds sweet and maybe a little sentimental, but

happiness studies have found that it works—in an oddly selfish way. By being kind and helping others, you actually help yourself. Bring a smile to someone's face by giving a compliment, doing a favor, offering help, or just being kind. You'll make someone else's day brighter, and you'll be happier yourself.

In the same way, spending money on someone else is a surer path to happiness than spending it on yourself. And volunteering in ways that help others has been found to boost the volunteers' psychological health.

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3. Curb excessive self-criticism.

Self-talk is the feedback people give themselves, and it's often critical, undermining your happiness. Be kind to yourself in reviewing your own actions and behavior. Learn from the setbacks and move on from them, rather than blaming yourself and digging yourself into an emotional hole. If you find yourself being overly self-critical, imagine how a caring friend would talk to you, or how you would talk to that friend. Retune your inner voice to be as kind.

If you need a nudge to shift to more positive thinking, make a list of your good qualities—the reasons people like to be with you and choose to have you as a friend, your skills and talents, your most important strengths. Just the act of writing those qualities down is often enough to break a cycle of self-criticism.

4. Pay attention to the good.

Another key happiness habit is optimism—not the blind optimism of people who can't see both sides of something, but realistic optimism that accounts for the downside while looking for the upside and working toward that better outcome. There's truth in the adage, "Every cloud has its silver lining." When you find yourself having a knee-jerk negative reaction to something—an event, a change at work, or another person—step back and look for the positive. What good might come of the event or change? What might you learn from this that could help you in the future? How might you reinterpret another person's behavior in more positive ways?

Once you find the good in a situation, even if it's just a faint glimmer of hope, that gives you something to work toward. Optimism is the habit of finding the good in life, even in what may seem like negative circumstances. And cultivating an optimism habit can make you happier.

5. Practice gratitude.

Contented people take time to think about what they're grateful for. It's a simple exercise, and it can work wonders to boost your mood and your outlook on life. By thinking about what you're grateful for—what you appreciate in other people, small and large things that give you pleasure, and what's going well in your life—you can pull yourself out of negative thought cycles. It's easy to focus on what's hard and what's going wrong, and that can make you miserable. Practicing gratitude pushes you to step back and consider what's good and going right.

To get started on the habit of practicing gratitude, you might write down three things you're grateful for at the end of every day. Go to sleep with those positive thoughts and remind yourself of them when you wake up. Over time, this can become your gratitude journal. You'll get better at seeing the good in life with practice, and reviewing what you've written can give you a lift when you're feeling down.

6. Focus on the present.

Dwelling on the past and worrying about the future can make you anxious and unhappy. When you make an effort to focus on the present moment, you can pull yourself out of those unhealthy thought patterns. Being present is at the core of mindfulness and meditation, practices that have been found to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety. You can find an app or take a class in mindfulness or meditation, or simply carve out a quiet time in your day to spend a few minutes contemplating the here and now.

The goal of being in the present moment isn't to force yourself to be happy. This moment may not be a happy one. Instead, the objective is to recognize and accept your emotions, whatever they are. That acceptance is what calms you and can bring you a more positive outlook.

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Think about what excites and energizes you, what acts or accomplishments you're most proud of, and how you want others to remember you. These priorities are sometimes called *eulogy values* as opposed to *résumé values*.

priorities are sometimes called *eulogy values* as opposed to *résumé values*.

Once you've given some thought to these deeper priorities, find ways to make more time for them. That might be by doing more for the people you love, volunteering to help those in need in your community, working on a creative talent, spending more time in nature, cultivating a passion for gardening or woodworking, or anything else that has significant meaning for you.

8. Get moving.

Regular physical activity is good for your body and mind. Whether it's a walk outside, a workout at the gym, or a yoga session, getting your body moving can lift your mood and sharpen your thinking. Exercise triggers the release of chemicals known as *endorphins* that make you feel calmer and happier. It reduces stress hormones, and it improves blood circulation throughout your body, including your brain. So, making a habit of regular physical activity can also be a happiness habit.

9. Resist the urge to compare yourself to others.

You can make yourself miserable by comparing yourself unfavorably to others—to their achievements, possessions, social ease, or beauty. It's a natural tendency, but taken too far it can be damaging to your self-esteem and mental health. As the Dalai Lama put it, "We need to learn to want what we have, not to have what we want, in order to get stable and steady happiness." Many of the ideas offered here can help you get past unhelpful comparisons with others. Practicing gratitude is a wonderful way to focus on the good in your life, for example.

Be careful in your use of social media, too. Recognize that people don't present their whole selves—with all of their ups and downs—on these platforms. They tend to show an artificially

sunny view of their lives by choosing only the happiest moments and pictures for their posts. You'll always come out the loser if you compare yourself to those carefully curated presentations.

10. Spend time in nature.

Studies have found that spending time in nature—even as little as 30 minutes a week—can reduce stress hormones and lower blood pressure. Other studies have linked the experience of awe—the feeling you might get from looking at the stars or noticing the beauty of a forest path—to more positive emotions. As you work more physical activity into your life, consider doing some of it in nature, giving yourself the flexibility to slow down and savor the natural environment.

As you can see from this list, greater happiness is within your reach. You don't have to be born with a sunny disposition or an optimistic personality. You can practice habits of thinking and being to make yourself happier. The goal isn't to be bright and cheerful every hour of every day. That would be exhausting, and life doesn't work like that. Everyone experiences setbacks and losses. It's human to be sad at times, even deeply unhappy. But the habits offered here can help you accept and cope with those negative emotions and, in time and on average, enjoy a happier life.

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MAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF

Making time for yourself is probably the last thing on your list, and probably one that you rarely ever get to. There's always someone or something that needs your attention, and taking care of others is more important than taking care of yourself, right? You might feel like it's hard enough to get everything done as it is and that you'll never find the time. But there are some very compelling, and important, reasons to try.

Aside from the health and spiritual benefits, another good reason to take care of yourself is your children. Chances are you spent a great deal of time and energy trying to find a quality child care provider for your little ones. Recognizing that quality care has a positive effect, you wanted to make sure that your kids are well cared for. But who's taking care of you, and how much can you give your children if your own energy banks are depleted? Making time to take care of yourself will help ensure you can provide your children with the quality care they deserve.

Why should you make time for yourself?

With the nonstop demands of work and family, there's always something to do. Energy is expended on work projects, taking care of the home, maintaining relationships, managing child care arrangements, and playing with the kids. But where does that energy come from? How can you recharge your batteries, so to speak?

Spending time alone on a regular basis has been shown to reduce heart rate and blood pressure. It can also play an important role in reducing stress, which can in turn enhance the immune system. Not to mention the spiritual rejuvenation that a few moments alone can spark.

What does it take?

Taking care of yourself doesn't have to be a big production, but it might require a shift in your mind set. Many working parents feel guilty if they don't spend every free moment with their kids. The first step is to recognize that you deserve the attention, that it doesn't make you a bad person, and that ultimately, it will allow you to give back more to the people you love. Have some fun coming up with

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MAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF

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- **Combine time alone with an enjoyable task.** Does cooking relax you? How about weeding or even mowing the lawn? You can always pick something that needs to be done and spend some time doing it alone.

By putting a little energy into caring for yourself, chances are you'll have more energy for everyone—and everything—else. That can only result in more quality time with your family.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2024). *Making time for yourself*. Raleigh, NC: Author.

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something that works for you—and then make sure you do it!

To get you started, here are a couple of suggestions for how to create some self-care time:

- **Take a bath.** Adding candles and soft music can make a half hour seem like a luxurious getaway.
- **Read a good book.** When was the last time you read something just for fun?
- **Go for a walk.** Visit a favorite park, or just stroll around the block.
- **Make a creative project.** Do you have a pile of photos and a photo album that needs to be completed? How about planting that herb garden? There's probably a project you've "put on hold" for some day when you have time. Make the time.
- **Get some exercise.** Not only is exercise good for you, but it helps relieve stress. Plus this feel-good activity is one that you can easily do by yourself.

MAKE THE HOLIDAYS YOUR OWN

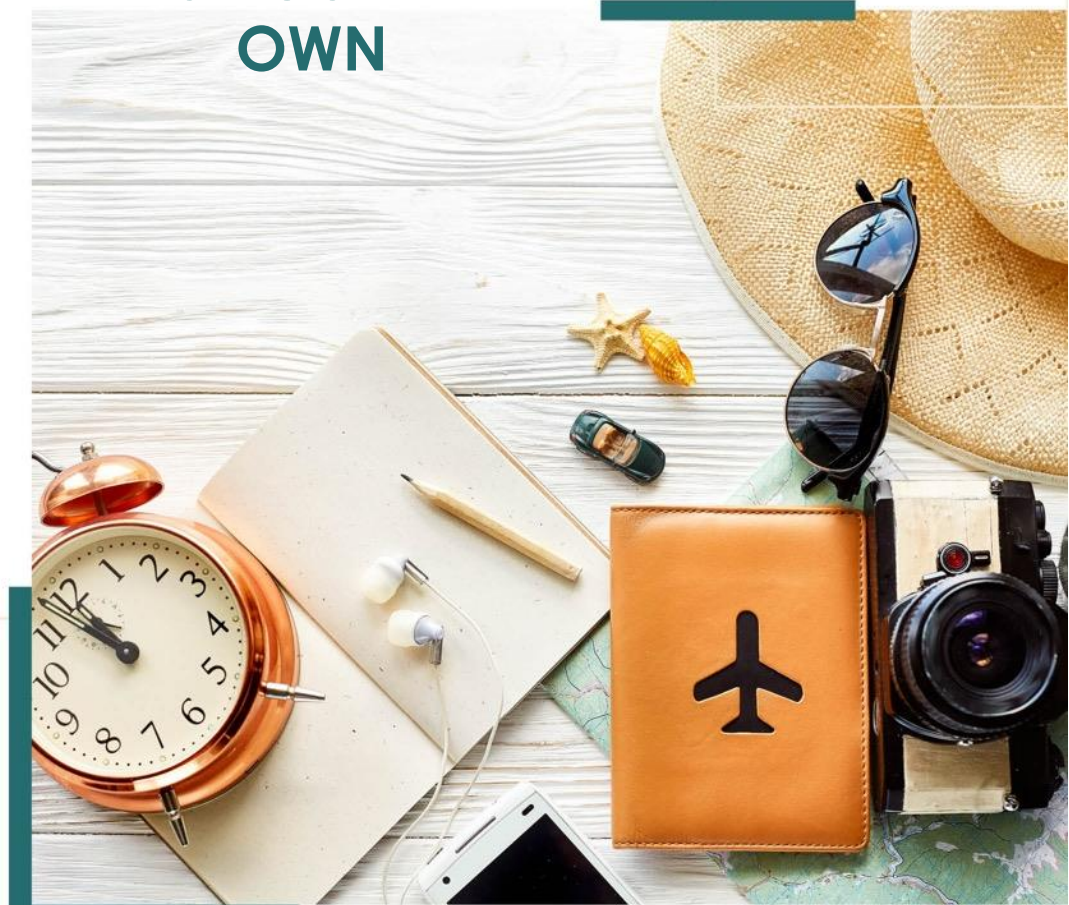
So it's that time of year again. You take one look at the calendar, and you're hit with pictures of perfect holidays. There are kids frolicking in the snow, big families laughing around a huge meal, and smitten couples exchanging gifts in front of the fireplace. The pressure is on to make the traditional holiday images come to life—or else!

But what about those people who aren't included those snapshots? More and more people are childless, single, divorced, or part of blended families who are working with multiple traditions in the same house. The truth is that lots of families today don't have a mom, a dad, and 2.5 Norman Rockwell children. And for many people, the pressure becomes too much. If you don't belong in a traditional holiday portrait, you can still make the holidays your own by creating your own traditions.

Figure out what you want.

Basically, holiday stress is caused by unrealistic expectations. In one word, stress is *should*. During the holidays, everyone, particularly those people who don't live anywhere near *It's a Wonderful Life*, can use a reminder to think about their own needs and desires for this time of year and not focus on what they've come to believe they should do.

Before the holidays, spend some time with yourself. Set aside a



couple of days to examine what you're really looking for during the holidays. If you had it your way, how would you paint the picture? Are the holidays about extended family, or about solitude? Is this the time to explore cultural roots and reconnect with religion, or a chance to reach out to strangers? Forget about what everyone else says or what your mother has always done, what do you want your holiday traditions to be?

Going It Alone, or Not

If you're single, you might look into doing volunteer work at a local soup kitchen, food bank, or homeless shelter. Maybe you want to do something totally self-indulgent. What's stopping you from spending a day relaxing at a spa, hiking or biking, or hopping on a plane and enjoying the holidays at the beach? Rely upon your family or friends who may have all sorts of interesting things planned. Also, friends with kids are not off limits during the holidays. If you want to be around children, find the families in your circle who'll welcome a guest to a holiday meal, and then ask what you can contribute. Maybe you're helping them fulfill their tradition.

The holidays also tend to put extra pressure on new relationships, whether it's a new romance or a new family unit. Keep in mind that now is not the time

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MAKE THE HOLIDAYS YOUR OWN

Continued

to force things. Concentrate on what's truly at the core of the holidays for you and find ways to embrace that together. Have fun. Chances are the new people in your life will feel relief as well without having to rush into a situation loaded with expectations.

Blending a family means staying flexible.

Blended families are faced with a particular challenge during the holidays. For kids and adults, thinking about celebrations past inevitably brings back memories, good and bad. It's important to talk about what each side of the family used to do, and what the new family can do now to make things special. Be flexible. It may be combining traditions, or it may be starting fresh. Planning can get complicated if the holidays are divided between families, but kids often don't mind celebrating more than once—in a different way in each home—no matter what date the celebration happens to fall upon.

Make a list of nos.

Just as important as your holiday wish list is pinning down what you don't want. Come up with a list of all the things that are not part of your ideal holiday, even if you may not be able to realistically eliminate them. Do you really want to deal with expensive gifts this year? Must you make an appearance at your neighbor's annual party? Do you have to invite your husband's ex-wife over for dinner? Include everything that makes you nervous just thinking about it. Call it a *stress list*.

Then practice saying *no*. It may sound silly, but practice it in front of the mirror. You'll probably find out that it works remarkably well when the time comes. And if not, at least you spoke up.

Timing is everything.

If you decide to shake your holidays up a bit you'll probably want to start planning early. Don't ambush your loved ones at the last minute by opting out of the family meal and announcing a solo trip to Mexico, or throw a new tradition at



the kids on Christmas Eve. You may have shifted your outlook, but it could take some time for the rest of the world to join you.

Change isn't always easy, especially when people are bombarded with old-fashioned images of holidays past that probably were not ever quite real. But once you can let go of the unrealistic expectations, visualize what you need, and take the holidays into your own hands, you are one step closer to having a stress-free season truly worth remembering.

Workplace Options. (Revised 2024). *Make the holidays your own*. Raleigh, NC: Author.

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