

35 Ways to Cut Stress, Save Time & Enjoy The Holidays

1. In November or early December, find an inexpensive but fun item--like a lovely ornament or even gift cards in small amounts--and buy several of them. So when I need a gift at the last minute, I have something on hand and don't need to dash out.
2. Choose just one or two holiday baked goods to make and give extras to my neighbor.
3. We set a goal to be done shopping early in December. To achieve this, my husband and I took a day off together and put together an organized plan and shopped.
4. We are trying a new tradition this year of a day of being "Good Elves". We grab some cash and find as many ways as possible to spread joy and see smiles. It means focusing on others, and it will be very low stress.
5. We always potluck Christmas dinner. No one is expected to host the whole thing.
6. Shopping online while drinking coffee or hot cocoa and wearing comfy pjs takes all the stress out for me.
7. We order a prepared holiday meal.
8. If my holiday cards are late, oh well. If I can't get them done in time I will order New Year's cards with the message, "Hope you had a great holiday!"
9. I personally don't buy/give physical gifts. I make a list of the people I really want to know that I love them and then use other methods to express it (letters, a handwritten recipe, mailing them my favorite book or quote, scanning an old picture of us and sending it with an email, etc). Instead of feeling like overwhelming tasks, it becomes reflective and is soul satisfying.
10. I've decided to covert to the 4-gift rule: Something they want, something they need, something to wear and something to read. Sounds just about right.
11. I'm coping with holiday stress by trying to workout. Nothing fancy, a 30 minute workout video or a walk with my dog.
12. I send electronic cards.

13. I recently discovered that the laundromat near me will do laundry for a very reasonable price. So I hired them to takeover the linens and towels. I don't do that every week--just when things are extra chaotic.
14. One thing that brings me great joy is trying to spend as much on others as I do my kids. This year I've bought presents for the Salvation Army, a youth treatment facility, three children in foster care and a woman at our local nursing home. Just typing that makes me smile.
15. Instead of presents for the kids we commit to more things where we are fully present: skiing, sledding, hiking, lots of hot cocoa and bonfires. And it's blissful. And our kids love it.
16. I vowed to have a green smoothie every day from Halloween to New Year's Day to help counteract all the rich foods. That has helped me feel a little more balanced nutritionally.
17. For presents, we have a "want, need, wear, read" plan for the kids. My husband and I buy our own presents (we're guaranteed to get what we want, thus no returns). Everyone else gets gift cards or a donation to Mercy Corp (Syrian refugees fund).
18. We decided to cut back on Christmas gifts and instead go away for a few days after Christmas to spend quality time together.
19. Instead of forcing myself to the gym I'm giving myself the permission to stay in my sweats and watch corny TV Christmas movies which make me insanely happy.
20. Meditate (I like the Insight Timer app). It will help you to focus on what's important to you and what of the small stuff you are sweating can be let go.
21. Not into personalized teacher gifts? Skip them. Trust me, as a daughter of teacher, I know gift cards are always welcome.
22. We have Christmas AFTER the holidays: less stress, less traffic, more focus, and more time to enjoy the Christmas program. We have done this for years now so it's a tradition.
23. I start shopping in July. I'm generally done by November. I get a list of five things closer to Christmas and then I order those things online. We've scaled back: A book, pajamas, a stocking and one fun gift per child.
24. I try to wrap gifts at night as I buy them so I don't have to do it last minute.
25. I say no to any event that is not super easy for us to attend.

26. Wine. Wine helps.

27. I'm swapping kids with my sister so we each have time to wrap gifts.

28. In 1994 I stopped buying gifts for girlfriends. Instead we agreed to buy each other a tree ornament. On that ornament, we write (with a Sharpie) the giver's name and year. We all agree that placing those ornaments on our tree every year is our favorite part of decorating the tree. Not having to worry about what to buy my girlfriends for Christmas takes a lot of the stress off me.

29. All gifts are purchased by Dec. 1st. No shopping after Dec. 1st. Invariably a couple of odds and ends come up. But truly, when all of the consumerism part of Christmas is done in advance it makes it so much easier to enjoy the family/cozy/seasonal part of Christmas.

30. Our rule is no leaving the house on Christmas Day. Anyone is welcome to come here, then we go visit family the next day.

31. Eat lots of protein and drink water to stay full and get off of the sugar roller coaster.

32. I do errands at off times to avoid crowds/traffic...most people don't realize how late or how early places are open during the holidays, including some grocery stores.

33. I slow way down. One fun event per weekend.

34. This year we are trying the Chinese food/movie plan for Christmas. New traditions can be made whenever you need them.

35. One of the biggest things that helps me is each year after Christmas we take a few minutes and debrief about what was good, what was bad, what we want to do differently the next year. These notes are SO helpful a year later. You really do forget! I even make notes of what we need to purchase the following year before all the wrap and bows and tags get packed away, so that the next year I can start shopping for those things even before we lug everything out.