

"I love Christmas—so why do I feel so stressed?"

It is the most wonderful time of year—but it can also be the most stressful! Our pros share the easy ways to make the holiday less hectic and enjoy the things that make this season so special: family and friends!

1 Streamline!

Execute code RED!

This season, red describes everything from Santa's suit to Rudolph's nose—and it also stands for organizer Dorothy Breining's acronym for holiday de-stressing. "RED means *reduce, eliminate and delete*," she says. "Got holiday cards you still want to send out? Instead of rushing to get it done, *reduce* your list to just your inner circle, *eliminate* folks you aren't that close to or *delete* the task completely—it's okay to not do it all. Or to avoid the stress that goes along with gift-giving, *reduce* the number of gifts you get each person, *eliminate*, say, stocking stuffers and *delete* a few people from your list if it's getting too long. Code RED can be applied to so many holiday to-dos."

Simplify plans with a theme!

"A great way to melt stress and reduce all the decisions people have to make this time of year is by selecting a theme for your holiday," Breining says. "One of my favorites is 'read and relax': Everyone picks out a book to give one another and instead of having to cook a big meal, you can relax with guests over tea, for example. It reduces the amount of shopping you do, and it's so much fun." Another theme that'll help

slash stress? "A 'family store holiday,'" Breining says. "We have so much stuff in our homes already, there's no reason to do more shopping. You can decorate with family photos, wear heirloom jewelry and ask everyone to give special family photos they love as presents!"

Have a holiday meditation!

"Take 20 minutes to go somewhere comfy and quiet, close your eyes and relax," she says. "Then ask yourself 'What do you want for yourself this holiday?' I've had people say everything from 'I want to clearly focus on the religious aspects of the holiday' to 'I want to go window shopping with friends in the city.' Once you get your answer, make a plan and put it on the calendar!"

2 Stress less, make more memories!

Bond by delegating!

The number-one way to de-stress over the holidays? "Let go of perfectionism!" urges stress expert Debbie Mandel. "Make a new list this year: *Things I don't like to do for Christmas*, and scratch them off or ask other people to do those tasks." Everyone in the family, including the kids, can pitch in. Health and



stress expert Daisy Sutherland agrees: "Learning to delegate has actually brought my family closer. For example, I used to do all the tree trimming myself every year because I wanted it to be perfect—but it was getting so stressful, I had to learn to let it go. Now my kids help do everything from decorate the tree to make the Christmas cookies. Is any of it perfect? No! But if you want perfect cookies, go to the bakery!"

Say no to say yes!

"Saying no can be especially hard during the holidays when tons of people are asking you to do things," says Sutherland. "But I always tell my clients it's okay to say no, even during the holidays, because it means you can say yes to other things like spending more time with your family!"

Savor experiences!

"A few years ago, we scaled back on gifts and instead took a road trip up north the day after Christmas," says Sutherland. "We live in Florida, and my kids had never seen snow. We took that trip three years ago, and they still talk about getting out on the side of the road in their flip-flops to catch snowflakes on their tongues. Memories like that last longer than any gift!"

—Kristina Mastrocola

Our expert panel



Dorothy Breining, the author of seven books including *Stuff Your Face or Face Your Stuff*, is an expert organizer for the A&E show *Hoarders*. Visit her online at DorothyTheOrganizer.com.



Debbie Mandel is the author of *Addicted to Stress: A Woman's 7-Step Program to Reclaim Joy and Spontaneity in Life*. Visit her stress management site at TurnOnYourInnerLight.com.



Daisy Sutherland, author of *Letting Go of Supermom*, has more than 25 years of experience educating families on ways to lead happier lives. Find more of her tips at WholisticFitLiving.com.

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