

12 Resilient Days of Christmas



The holiday season is intended to be an enjoyable time of renewal, reflection and connection with family. All too often though, we discover ourselves tired from a grueling year of work, travel and deadlines. Christmas can be a stressful time. The expense of buying gifts, the pressure of last minute shopping and the heightened expectations of family togetherness can all combine to undermine our best intentions.

Charity, Heart Research UK, claim that stress levels can increase at Christmas, raising blood pressure and putting a strain on health. Surveys conducted by the University of East London 2010, found Christmas shopping can increase blood pressure to potentially dangerous levels. Half of the shoppers who took part in the study were deemed to have 'at risk' blood pressure readings after just 75 minutes of Saturday Christmas shopping!

Simple things like stepping out for a brisk walk, having some relaxing 'me time', catching up on sleep and enjoying a good laugh with friends will help to manage the stress and take care of our heart's health.'

The following resilient suggestions can help you reduce your 'Christmas stress'. Use our '12 days of Christmas as a guide:

Master Stress

Day	Activity	Completed (✓)
1	BREATHE - 90 Second Breathing Technique - 4x Per Day	
2	FLOW - Find 'Flow' at least once per day (listen to joyful music, savour a coffee or tea, walk outside, find an enjoyable activity to recuperate your energy.	
3	SWITCH OFF - If overwhelmed, avoid becoming a slave to technology. Switch off email or blackberry for at least an hour a day to focus fully on a task. Avoid 'after hours' temptation of responding to email during relaxation time or immediately prior bedtime.	

Energise Body

Day	Activity	Completed (✓)
4	EXERCISE - embark on an exercise plan - Briskly walk, run, swim, paddle or bike ride for 20mins x 3 per week, with aim to reach 5x per week by end of January	
5	SLEEP - Prepare for sleep with a brain 'cool down' 45 minutes before bed - a guided, audio deep relaxation is ideal. Prior to bedtime, Avoid laptop, TV, iPad, phone and electronic screens, as these stimulate our mind into wakefulness.	
6	DIET - to stave of temptation of sugar and snack cravings, eat a healthy, low GI breakfast with wholegrains and/or protein (eggs). Choose nuts, fruit or low fat yogurt instead of processed chips, sugary snacks and unhealthy party foods.	

Engage Emotion

Day	Activity	Completed (✓)
7	POSITIVITY - Make a conscious effort to list all the positive things you did or experienced during the year. Remember that most New Year's Eve resolutions are unrealistic and made during times of sad reflection. This year, try to come up with positive and achievable goals for the upcoming 12 months.	
8	REFLECT - Be Realistic and accepting of yourself - Trying to please everyone can drive anxiety and stressful 'self talk' or emotion. Accept the small imperfections. Be kind to yourself, have realistic expectations of Christmas	

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Train Mind

Day	Activity	Completed (✓)
9	<p>HABIT - It's scary how much you can eat or drink at a party without realising what you've consumed. If you know you are a 'mindless muncher', make a conscious choice to surround yourself with healthier snacks, such as vegetable crudites or unsalted nuts etc.</p> <p>Additionally, make an active choice whether you will drink OR have a treat at a christmas party; try to avoid <i>both</i></p>	
10	<p>REFLECT - Be Realistic and accepting of yourself - Trying to please everyone can drive anxiety and stressful emotion. Accept the small imperfections. Be kind to yourself, have realistic expectations of Christmas</p>	

Spirit in Action

Day	Activity	Completed (✓)
11	<p>MINDFULNESS - Mindfulness means paying attention with openness, curiosity and flexibility. Try mindful listening with a family member or friend at Christmas. Listen to their choice of words, tone of voice, facial expressions and body language. The challenge is to listen with no other agenda than to understand the partner's thoughts and emotions, to remain fully engaged.</p> <p>This practice is about disengaging from self-centred "mind chatter", letting go of judgments about the other person, and cultivating "focused attention". It's also intended to help develop richer relationships with the people around you.</p>	
12	<p>RENEW - The closing of another year is prime time to take stock, consider career, purpose and values. Understand your key strengths and authentic purpose for 2012 and beyond - complete the VIA Survey of Character Strengths www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu</p>	