

One More Christmas Checklist!

How to simplify the season and have your happiest Christmas

You can have your Christmas and enjoy it too!

You love the holidays, but in the midst of what should be the most joyous of seasons you're overwhelmed and frazzled. You have too much to do in too little time. Gifts, cards, baking, decorations, church pageants, parties, family get-togethers, and the list goes on. But Christmas is not about being in a constant state of panic, fearing you'll never get everything done. Nor are the holidays about how many gifts are under the perfectly decorated tree. They're not about having so much to do that there is little time left to spend with your spouse and your kids. And they're not about feeling that you have to do it or it just won't be Christmas. In the rush to do it all, the real meaning of Christmas can be forgotten.

Christmas is traditions.

Every year you promise yourself that you'll stay calm and truly enjoy the season, yet when the most enjoyable activities are crowded into an already-tight schedule, they often conflict and overwhelm. Consider your overinflated "to-do" list. Are there tasks on that list you could do without? Try this easy way to find out.

Make a second list titled "It Wouldn't Be Christmas Without ...". Write down all the traditions, foods, and activities that make the holidays special for your family. Now compare the lists. Anything not on both lists is expendable, a task or event you can decide to do on a selective basis--only if you have the time and only if you want to. So this year, make the gingerbread house with your kids, but don't host a neighborhood party. Next year you can give the party and skip something else.

If it's your turn to host the family holiday dinner, start a new tradition and simplify. You do the main course, and ask each family member to bring something for the dinner.

Christmas is a family time.

In most families women are the holiday planners, organizers, hosts, decorators, shoppers, and bakers. Often these Christmas magicians don't realize how much extra work they're doing, because they don't really think of it as work until they're exhausted. If you choose to do it all yourself, you

have no right to complain. But if you honestly want to share the joy of the season with your family, ask for their help and cooperation.

Children as young as 2 can stand on a stool and help decorate and bake cookies. Older children can help trim the tree and wrap gifts. Whatever they do may not always be up to your standards, but it enhances the enjoyment of the holiday for everyone, and is less work for you.

Instead of overloading your schedule with holiday activities that crowd out what you'd really like to be doing, just say no. You don't have to accept every holiday party invitation. Take a break from the holiday rush by going on a family adventure to a museum, art gallery, or a carol sing. Or make a bowl of popcorn and watch the video *It's a Wonderful Life* as a family.

Christmas is giving.

It wouldn't be Christmas without gifts under the tree, but with a little planning ahead you can save time and aggravation. Be realistic when the hand-knitted scarf for Aunt Mary is only half made. Put it away, and finish it for next Christmas. This year, buy her a book. Shop with a list of gift ideas in the mornings and/or evenings. Avoid the lunch-hour rush and weekends, if possible. Not only are the stores overly, crowded; it's almost impossible to find a parking space.

Plan your shopping route so you don't backtrack and run from store to store. Request a box when you purchase a gift. Many small gift and toy stores offer free gift wrapping. If you shop through a catalog or over the Internet, gifts can be gift-wrapped and sent directly to the recipient.

Have an idea for a special, unique gift for your spouse? Before you leave home, call stores to see if they have it.

Christmas is memories.

No other holiday is so strongly etched in the mind of a child, yet gifts are not the part of Christmas a child remembers most. Giving them an expensive video game is easy, but years, later the child remembers when they went with you to see the lighting of your town's Christmas tree, or when you read "Twas the Night Before Christmas" before bedtime on Christmas Eve. Think back to your own Christmas memories, and you'll probably recall things like baking cookies with Grandma, stringing popcorn and cranberries for tree decorations, and singing in the church choir that mean Christmas to you.

Christmas is keeping in touch.

Dislike sending Christmas cards? Don't do it this year, or simplify. Cut your list down. Don't send cards to people you see every day. Don't send cards to close friends and relatives to whom you are giving gifts. Send cards only to those you don't see or hear from very often and don't want to lose contact with. Yes, it's a nice touch to add a note to every card, but it certainly isn't necessary. In fact, instead of sending a card to an old friend or relative who lives far away, pick up the phone and wish them a Merry Christmas.

Christmas is a joyful time.

At least once a day, stop what you're doing and do something that brings you joy--it may be doing something special for your spouse, your kids, or yourself. Sip a cup of herbal tea. Read Luke 2 to your kids. Look at old Christmas pictures. Take a walk with your spouse. Listen to holiday music. Sit quietly and enjoy your Christmas tree. After 20 minutes you should feel refreshed and relaxed--ready once again to face the hectic holiday pace.

Christmas is a celebration.

Take time to remember the true meaning of Christmas.

Each year we look forward to the holidays as a joyous time of peace and reflection. But it's hard to remember what's important when we're all caught up in a seemingly endless round of errands and activities. What's important is the people we love. The things we do for the holidays are a way to express that love. All too soon this Christmas will be in the past, so enjoy each activity for itself instead of always thinking about what is ahead of you, what you still have to do. You can have your Christmas and enjoy it too!