

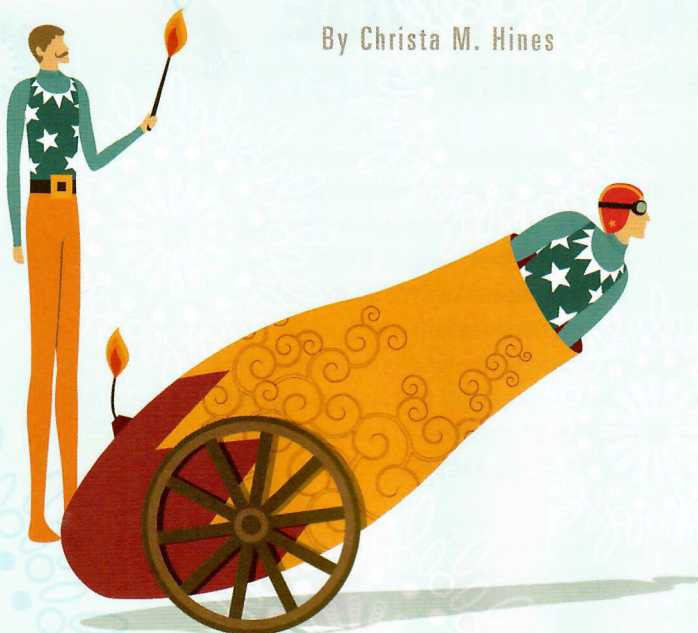
12 TIPS to TAME the



HOLIDAY CIRCUS

The holidays don't have to feel like a three-ring circus. Here's how to have a season of happiness, peace, and purpose—without all the chaos, clowns, and tightrope walking.

By Christa M. Hines



A

re holiday traditions, parties, volunteer commitments, and shopping turning you into the frenzied ringmaster of a runaway circus train? For your sanity and health, put the brakes on the holiday rush. Here's how.

1 CANCEL SOME OF THE SIDESHOWS.

Leave a few activities off the program this year. Ellie Griffin, a vitality coach, says this is one of her favorite ways to reduce holiday stress. "I love having my clients do this exercise because it makes them realize how much of what they do doesn't have an effect on the big picture of their lives," she says.



2

DON'T TRY TO CREATE THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH.

Let go of rituals and traditions that are more work than fun or are no longer meaningful. Attempting to turn the holiday season into the greatest show on earth could put your health at risk. According to the American Psychological Association, chronic stress can weaken your immune system (making it harder to recover from illness) and can cause heart disease, obesity, and depression.

3 STEP OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT.

You perform better when you're well-rested. So step away from the action and aim to get seven to eight hours of sleep per night, which can help you cope better with stress. "Poor sleep habits keep you jittery, irritable, and feeling like you're just dragging yourself around," says Rosalie Moscoe, author of *Frazzled, Hurried Woman!: Your Stress Relief Guide to Thriving . . . Not Merely Surviving*.



4

CHOREOGRAPH THE CHAOS.

Organize your shopping trips. Ask for help from your significant other or family members. When possible, buy gifts whenever you're already out running errands. Make shipping presents a breeze by purchasing some online. After pounding the pavement, reward yourself with dinner out, pizza delivery, or a relaxing evening by a cozy fire.



5 CLOWN AROUND.

During the holidays, try not to fill every free moment with a task or event. Instead, go through your calendar and block out a little time each day to do something relaxing, like meeting a friend for lunch, taking a nap, or reading a book.



6

JUGGLE LESS.

Planning, cooking, cleaning, and entertaining can test even the most talented acrobat. Host a lighthearted appetizer party instead of a serious dinner soiree. Choose menu items that can be prepared ahead of time, or support a local cook or caterer by placing an order for party fare. That way you'll be able to enjoy the festivities along with your guests.



7

RELY ON YOUR SAFETY NET.

"Ask for help!" says Moscoe, who recommends delegating tasks to family members and loved ones. Even children can help with simple tasks. "Take a break, be kind to yourself. There will always be something to finish—that's life." For casual parties, prepare the main dish, and ask your friends if they can bring side items or desserts.



8

DON'T TURN INTO A TIGER.

Hunger can bring out the tiger in anyone. Instead of munching on sugary or junky indulgences, eat wholesome foods to give you a stable mood and energy. "Don't bring extra cookies or chocolate into the house in advance of the holidays," Moscoe says. "This will make you cranky, tired, and cause fluctuations in blood sugar."



12

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE CHARM AND WONDER.

Carefully consider what makes the holidays special for you and your family. Ask your kids too. Their answers may surprise you. Instead of an elaborate trip or event, they might just want to build a gingerbread house or spend a day in their pajamas drinking hot chocolate and watching seasonal movies.



9

REVEL IN THE MOMENT.

Duck out of the buzzing fluorescent lights and long lines. Take an evening stroll to breathe in the cool air and admire the holiday lights illuminating the streets. Allow the movement to calm your mind without further stressing your body.

10 PLAN FOR SURPRISES.

Keep tricks up your sleeve for managing those last-minute gift exchanges. While running errands, purchase small gifts that you can stash. And go ahead and store those extra cookies in the freezer for drop-in visitors.



11 SIMPLIFY THE DECOR.

If holiday decor makes you sweat, swap time-consuming and expensive lights and ornaments for minimal or homemade decorations. For example, try making luminaries with your kids. Draw a star or tree on a lunch-size paper bag. Punch holes into the design, and fill the bag with sand. Place battery-charged tea lights inside the bags, and line them up on your porch or driveway.

Most of all, resolve to bring your holidays from over the big top to just right for you. Even one small change can make all the difference between anxiously counting the days until the show is over and living in the moment while celebrating peace and joy with your family. ❖

Freelance journalist Christa M. Hines is the author of *Healthy, Happy & Hyperconnected: Raise a Thoughtful Communicator in a Digital World*. Her circus includes her strongman husband, two teens who love to clown around, and an entertaining mutt who does tricks for treats.