

mind • body • spirit

vibrant life

America's Oldest Health Magazine Since 1885



Homemade Gifts

for Everyone on Your List

(including your favorite dog!)

JOURNAL YOUR WAY
TO BETTER HEALTH

Turn Your **Holiday Woes**
into **Holiday Wins**

How Gratitude Can
Change Your Life

AN INTROVERT'S GUIDE
TO THE **HOLIDAYS**





Turn Your

HOLIDAY WOES INTO WINS

How to Transform Even the Worst Situations

Don't let the stress and pressures of the season defeat you. **Instead, transform woes into wins.**

By
Christa M.
Hines

For years, no sooner did I flip the calendar to November than my holiday anxiety would begin to creep in. As I anticipated the upcoming must-dos and should-dos on top of the routine day-to-day dos, my stomach would clench, my neck would tighten, and a persistent twitching would start in my left eye.

After a particularly grueling holiday season of shopping for the “perfect” gifts, wrapping, decorating, attending my children’s school functions, baking and cooking, while also juggling work deadlines, I woke up Christmas morning with my throat on fire and knifelike stabs of pain jolting in my ears.

Instead of spending time with my family, I spent the day in bed sucking on throat lozenges and sipping

warm, honeyed tea. The next day, the urgent care physician diagnosed me with the beginning stages of shingles, a painful viral condition likely brought on by stress.

According to a 2023 American Psychological Association survey, nearly 9 in 10 Americans report feeling overwhelmed and stressed between November and January. Many cite money worries, loneliness, and family conflict as their primary sources of stress. Unmanaged stress makes us more vulnerable to illness and increases the risks of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.

With the right strategies, you *can* take back control of your holidays and turn those frustrating holiday woes into healthier, more meaningful holiday wins. Here’s how.



WOE

The holidays leave you swimming in debt.

A 2023 survey by LendingTree found that more than a third of Americans go into debt during the holiday season. Among those who took on debt, 65% said they hadn't planned on doing so.

According to Sarah Nicole Nadler, a money coach, author, and founder and CEO of Fierce Feminine Finance, we're more likely to run into money trouble due to impulse buying, a lack of healthy budgeting, and unhealed money trauma.

"People who have unhealed trauma around money are buying out of a desire to fill a void with material objects that don't bring them happiness and aren't tied to their ultimate dream for their life," Nadler says. "When unhealed trauma is related to family in some way, spending can reach its peak during the holidays."

For example, if certain family members trigger a sense of competition, resentment, or jealousy, you might feel more compelled to spend money on yourself or others to quell those emotions.

"It can be something as innocent as a wealthy uncle who's always had a sibling rivalry with your parents who were poor," Nadler explains. "Now as an adult at Christmas, you might dress flashier, buy extra things, or try to give everybody gifts in front of that wealthy uncle instead of confronting the fact that you have some trauma on the subject of money from watching this conflict growing up."



● Establish your priorities.

Write down your priorities for this holiday season to clarify your spending decisions. Decide who you want to buy gifts for this year. Think about the types of experiences that bring you joy. More quality time with friends? Celebrating specific family traditions?

● Set limits.

Reduce stress by creating and sticking to a budget that reflects your priorities. Anticipate and evaluate opportunities that will come up and measure them against your priorities. Are there events, obligations, or places you can avoid this year (and perhaps don't even enjoy) to help save money?

● Recognize your impulses.

If you're tempted to impulse buy, avoid big box stores and be sure to delete or unsubscribe from tempting email marketing offers. Shop local or look for discounts online for specific items you want to buy.

● Seek healthier alternatives to spending.

If you believe your money woes are rooted in past trauma, consider talking with a therapist or your spiritual advisor. And get creative.

"Art therapy is powerful," Nadler says. "I've noticed when people have a desire to shop, it's (often) a desire for beautiful things." If this describes you, "rather than buying your way to beauty, find creative outlets and start filling that void with art or something more creative and healthy."

Nadler also suggests researching your family history or cultural background. Are there interesting holiday foods or traditions you could adopt or revive that have nothing to do with buying gifts?





WOE

You feel obligated to carry on a family tradition.

Maybe you're tired of hosting the annual family gathering, which usually ends in arguments and hurt feelings. Or you're overwhelmed by the idea of dragging your grumpy children out of state to see extended family. If a long-standing tradition creates more stress than joy, it might be time to try something new.

Relational therapist Dawn Hood, MS, LPC, recommends communicating your plans ahead of time to give those involved time to adapt. "People will adjust, but you have to be prepared. If you have somebody you can partner with to try a different tradition or make a different plan, that's awesome. If you don't, it's going to be a little harder, but you can still do it."

Since your decision may not be popular with some, lean on your emotional support system during this time, like a loved one, coworker, or therapist. Choose someone who will listen and help counteract any negative thoughts you might experience.



● **Be clear about the purpose of the change and when the change will happen.**

Remain positive and firm, while understanding that some of your loved ones may grieve the change.

For example:

- ▼ "We're excited to start our own family traditions this year, so we won't be visiting this time."
- ▼ "We've decided to try something new and spend Thanksgiving at the beach, so I won't be hosting the traditional family dinner this year."
- ▼ "Instead of our usual sit-down meal, this year I'm hosting a cookie decorating and game night. I hope you can make it!"



WOE

The holidays leave you feeling lonely.

When everyone else seems to be celebrating with friends and family, the holidays can feel painfully lonely.

Because it's possible to feel lonely even when surrounded by others, loneliness is defined as a state of mind. According to the American Psychiatric Association, one in three Americans is affected by loneliness, which can have serious health consequences, increasing the risks of dementia, stroke, heart disease, depression, and premature death.

Consider if holiday loneliness is a pattern that's been going on for several years or if it's a temporary season of transition. It's normal to feel lonely if you're grieving the death of a loved one or a divorce, or adjusting to a new phase of life, like an empty nest or living in a new city with no close friends or relatives nearby.

If it's a pattern, seek ways to begin connecting with others, such as through volunteering in the community or joining a group with shared interests.

"Your happily ever after is lived on a day-to-day basis," Hood says. "When you start thinking in a way of planning forward and putting yourself in a positive state, you start to attract other people."



● **Make time for yourself.**

Instead of leaving your holiday plans to chance, get intentional with a plan of action. Put something on the calendar that you can look forward to that's just for you, like a weekend getaway.

● **Start a new tradition.**

Invite your friends over for "Friendsgiving." Then, spend the actual Thanksgiving holiday doing a positive activity, such as volunteering to serve dinner at a homeless shelter or spending the day relaxing with a book or hobby.

To help you decide what to do for the holidays, Hood recommends asking yourself this question: "How can I make the situation more positive to me so that I can show up that morning, be happy, and have something to look forward to?"



WOE

You attend holiday gatherings with confrontational people.

Every year you go to your family's holiday party, and every year Cousin Ricky tries to draw you into a political debate that devolves into personal attacks. Meanwhile, Aunt Suzy chastises you for not limiting your child's sweets intake. Several hours later, you're feeling drained and anxious to go home, but your spouse isn't ready to leave.

Nothing saps the holiday spirit like a confrontational evening stuck with people who love to push your buttons. And yet, there might be individuals at these gatherings who you and your family do want to see. What should you do?



● **Agree on a plan.**

Establish your exit strategy by deciding beforehand when you'll leave. Drive separately if you know your partner will want to stay longer.

● **Set an intention.**

On your way to the party, practice deep breathing to calm your nervous system. Visualize the situation based on past experiences. Who would you like to hang out with? Who are you going to avoid?

Hood suggests having a phrase or sentence in mind that you can repeat to yourself to remind you how you would like to respond. "The one I use frequently is 'peace, poise, confidence,'" she says.

By repeating this to yourself, it can help you manage negative interactions from a place of calm.

● **Avoid confrontation.**

If you can't completely avoid a confrontational person, keep your responses neutral or light, and then physically move away from them. "It's not the time to correct them, change them, or give them words of wisdom," Hood says. **vi**

With a healthy balance of intention and ease, you'll experience less stress and unwrap a more meaningful, joyous, and peaceful season. And isn't that the best gift of all?

Christa M. Hines is a content strategist and award-winning writer.