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Always consult your medical professional if you are unsure about whether any of the suggested strategies are suitable for you.

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Acknowledgements & Gratitude

A huge thank you to everyone who has ever helped me create my own Christmas stresses, to those who have done a grand job themselves and let me join in – and to the many friends and clients who have shared their experiences with me and allowed me to help.

This book is dedicated to my Mum.

Without her dropping the Christmas turkey all those years ago,
this book wouldn't exist.

Thank you Mum. xxxx

Message From The Author

Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing 101 Ways To De-Stress Your Christmas.

Having witnessed – and been part of – so much Christmas stress over the decades, it was clear to me that few of us have enough time to read heavyweight ‘de-stress your life’ books at this time of year. That can wait till January.

What we need are short-and-sweet, but highly effective solutions: the kind of strategies that fit in with our hectic Christmas preparations and are easy to apply.

So I’d like to thank my family, friends and mentoring clients for inspiring the creation of 101 Ways To De-Stress Your Christmas.

My aim is to provide you with bite-sized inspiration, to help you feel less stressed and have a happier Christmas.

Far from being lightweight, the techniques in this book are based on sound psychological principles.

However, they are presented in a way that I hope is much more digestible than Grannie’s mushy sprouts and I’d love them to leave you more enthusiastic about enjoying Christmas than unwrapping yet another of Aunt Mabel’s reindeer jumpers.

This book is not intended to be a permanent fix for all the stress sources and habits in your life. It’s Christmas and you’re busy. Permanent fixes can wait till the New Year! You won’t have to wade through chapter upon chapter of research theories and case studies to uncover the precious stress-reducing nuggets you’re looking for.

The strategies in this book are designed to form a highly practical – and fun - Christmas stress first aid kit, to see you through the festive season.

Some of the 101 techniques and ideas may be familiar to you. But there will also be many that offer solutions to your current Christmas stresses.

I hope you will try them out and find them useful.

Remember: those that work best for you can help you throughout the coming year.

“De-stressing is for life, not just for Christmas.”

Wishing you a wonderful Christmas and a very happy year to come.

Clare Josa

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How To Get The Most Out Of This Book

Whatever kind Christmas Stress you're suffering from, this book brings you the tips, techniques and strategies you need, to help you reduce your stress levels this.

They are based on sound psychological principles, bucket loads of common sense and simple, yet effective, strategies I've discovered over the years of surviving yet another family Christmas, usually with a dollop of humour!

So whatever your Christmas stresses, there will be plenty here to help you out. Some strategies and tips are short-and-sweet. Others go into more detail, with specially designed exercises, to help you dump your Christmas stress.

How To Use This Book

We're all different. And our minds all work in different ways. That's why this book has been specially designed for you to use in the way that best suits your needs.

There are 3 main ways you can work with this book:

1. Start to finish

Read it cover to cover, applying the techniques that resonate for you, as you go along. Don't worry if the occasional tip or strategy doesn't seem to fit for you; that's fine, just skip to the next one.

2. Just Jump In

Skim the contents page. Which section is calling out to you? Or you can read the full list of strategies at the end of the book. Pick the techniques that jump out at you and start with those.

3. Feeling Lucky?

Take a moment to quieten your mind. Then ask yourself, "What do I most need right now?" Before your conscious mind gives you an

answer, open the book at a random page. Chances are you'll have picked the perfect strategy for your needs.

However you choose to make the most of the rest of this book, it's a good idea to work through the strategies part one first, as they form the foundation for the rest of the book. Check it out and all will become clear!

Treat it as your Christmas Stress First Aid kit!

This book won't do much for you unless you actually use the stuff that's in it! Apply the strategies, play with the exercises, enjoy the questions. Keep the book with you, throughout the festive season, so you can dip into it whenever you need it.

"Psssst! The great thing is that most of these strategies aren't just for Christmas – you can use them all year round."

And Next Year?

How about keeping a journal of the "lightbulb" moments you encounter, as you de-stress your Christmas? Make a note of the decisions, choices and strategies that really work for you. Otherwise you're likely to forget them over the coming year and it would be a pity to have to reinvent the wheel!

Are you ready to get started?

Part One: How Do You Do Christmas Stress?

Strategies 1 - 10

Whether you're getting in the car or making changes in your life, there are two critical things you need to figure out, before you start.

- Where do you want to go
- Where are you starting from?

We take this for granted when we're driving. But, believe it or not, most of us forget to do either of these things, before we make changes in our life.

Without figuring out where we are and having a clear idea of where we want to end up, the likelihood of finishing at our dream destination is zero!

So before you start looking at how to de-stress your Christmas, it's really useful to understand how you actually 'do' getting stressed.

What is "Christmas stress" in your world?

They say that the best way to learn how to do something is to teach it.

Imagine you had to teach a Martian how to "do" your version of Christmas stress, which steps would they need to go through?

Figuring this out gives you a massive head start on dealing with your stress triggers and having a happier, calmer Christmas.

It helps you focus and make practical changes that will really shift things for you.

So here are 10 simple strategies to help you avoid falling into the “destination nowhere” trap.

Once you know what your “Christmas stress habits” are, you can start doing something about them!

1. What's The Point Of It All?

Let's start by figuring out why you're even bothering with Christmas stress! How about making a list of the top 10 reasons why you love Christmas?

The easiest way to create this list is to get someone else to ask you the question and scribble down your answers:

"What do you love about Christmas?"

If you feel stuff like "I have to..." creeping in, let that thought pass and think again.

If you get stuck, try flicking back through specific, happy Christmas memories and writing down a sentence to remind you of those.

Be specific. If you can, include the things you love to see, hear, feel, smell and even taste – make your list a wonderful sensory experience.

It's usually quite easy to get the first 5 or 6, but if you keep going to number 10 (or beyond!), you'll get some real gems. There's a good reason why we're doing this exercise – as I'll explain shortly!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Re-read your list. Does it motivate you? Excite you?

No? Then take out anything that makes you feel less than happy and switch it for something else that you love about Christmas.

Here's how the list can help you.

You can refer back to this list every time you're feeling stressed over the Christmas period! It'll help you keep things in perspective.

This list is your 'why'.

It's also a great way of motivating yourself to make changes to your stress patterns.

"Change doesn't stick till you give it a good reason to."

We often forget to give ourselves a powerful enough "why?", when we want to make changes. And that's why change often doesn't stick – and new habits can be hard to form.

How about copying your list out and sticking it on your fridge door?

That way it can lift your mood, whenever you spot some Christmas stress coming your way!

2. What's Your Christmas Stress Type?

Are you about to crack?

Sometimes it can be difficult to feel happy because we're too stressed out. It can get to the stage where every-day things get on top of us. Our mind races. Our body is constantly in a state of tension and we revert to our "stress type" behaviour.

It's an automatic, unconscious thing that we usually don't spot till we're in the middle of it.

*Recognising your personal stress type
is the first step towards being able to
do something about it.*

Remember that car journey we wouldn't go on, without first checking where we are? Well dealing with your Christmas stress type is just like that.

Whatever your Christmas stress type, being aware of it frees you up to make the choice of whether or not to change.

Personally, I'm not a big fan of giving people 'labels', 'pigeon holes' or 'boxes' but the fact is that most of us have preferred ways of reacting, when we're stressed. And sometimes being able to identify with a profile of some kind can help us spot the game we're playing and start to make changes.

So in this section we'll be doing a whistle-stop tour of five Christmas stress types: Strong & silent, the Drama Queen, the Brigadier, the Christmas Fairy and the Willing Volunteer.

These are, of course, caricatures of how we respond to Christmas stress – and there's a little bit of each of them in all of us.

They're not intended as deeply serious psychological profiles – they're a fun way of taking a quick look in our Christmas stress mirror.

Are you ready for your whistle-stop tour?

The Strong, Silent type

Are you the strong, silent type? Do you bubble away inside, like a pre-eruption volcano, whilst pretending to the outside world that all is well?

In times of stress, we all need someone around who is the strong one, unflustered by the outside events. But if this is the role you're playing and it's secretly a cover for inner turmoil, then you're paying a great price.

You could find this bottled-up stress impacting your physical health, as well as your general mood.

Sometimes it's more important to be honest about how you're feeling, even if that's not your usual style.

Being a rock comes from within. Unless you recognise that your foundations are wobbling, you're creating an internal conflict that could make things worse for you.

It's ok to wobble. It's ok to tell people how you're feeling.

Sometimes that's a sign of real strength.

Drama Queen

Are you the Drama Queen? (No offence or judgement meant here – I'm still an occasional expert in this one!).

Do you gladly share tales of your woes with all who will listen?

Although this off-loading might make you feel better in the short term, all it actually does is keep you stuck in your stress. And probably make you want to yell at anybody who suggests a potential solution – including yourself!

So if you catch yourself indulging in the drama, it's worth pausing for a moment, taking a deep breath, and asking yourself whether this is where you really want to go.

There are 3 quick questions you can ask yourself, before you share your woes:

1. Is what I want to say absolutely true?
2. Is what I want to say positive and uplifting?
3. Is what I want to say of genuine benefit to the person listening?

If the answer to any of these is no, then it's probably best not to say anything.

If it's the talking about your problem that is helping you, how about changing tack and asking people to help you find answers, instead?

Brigadier

Are you the Brigadier? Stiff upper lip, carry on regardless, got to achieve the goal? Prepared to steam-roller through resistance, should anyone be foolish enough to get in your way?

You know best and there's no way anyone else is going to get a say over what gets done – or how.

This can be a highly effective stress response, if those around you are doing the “rabbits in headlights” syndrome. It gets stuff done.

But it doesn't win friends or create a safe environment for people to learn or even make mistakes.

So sometimes the Brigadier is an appropriate response.

But if you want those around you to have the confidence to make their own decisions and learn from their experiences, so you don't have to take charge next time, then the Brigadier is unlikely to achieve that aim. It's more likely to create an atmosphere where people feel scared of being judged and criticised, and perhaps even avoid you, even if that's not what you intended – certainly not very Christmassy.

If you want to play with not being the Brigadier for a while, the easiest way is to keep your mouth shut and listen more, whilst paying attention to your body language. Make sure you're not saying one thing with your mouth and another with your posture...

It's about creating opportunities for those around you to tentatively make suggestions, giving them back some responsibility and control.

Not always easy, when you're used to being the boss!

Fluttering Fairy

Are you the Fluttering Fairy, jumping from the top of one Christmas tree to the next? Are you keeping all your plates spinning, whilst not really getting anything done?

And perhaps you sometimes get caught in the “rabbit in the headlights” syndrome, where you feel so overwhelmed that you can’t even get started?

The danger with this stress type is that you can appear to be very busy and efficient, so those around you might not notice what’s really going on. This means they’re unlikely to offer help, until everything falls apart.

The answer here is to stop and take some time out.

Just 10 minutes spent quietly considering your plan of action will save you hours – or more – in running around.

Then take baby steps.

Don’t let yourself drown in everything that needs doing. Just keep asking yourself, “what’s the one thing I could do now?” and focus on that – and only that – until it’s finished.

You might be amazed at how much more you get done, when you stop multi-tasking.

Willing Volunteer

Everyone loves a Willing Volunteer, because it gets the rest of us off the hook.

We might be able to see that the Willing Volunteer's camel is so heavily laden that it can't possibly carry its burden any more, but we pretend not to notice.

If you're the Willing Volunteer, you'll find yourself taking on more and more of the jobs that others could be helping with, until you find yourself resenting them.

And Willing Volunteers rarely complain until it's way too late!

If this is you, it's essential that you learn to add a teeny weeny step into your "yes" process. Before you open your mouth to say, "ok", ask yourself:

"Is this really my job? Or could someone else be better placed to do it?"

Sometimes it's a control thing – a bit of inner Brigadier coming out to play - we think we could do it better, so would rather overload ourselves than trust others.

Sometimes we're just keen to help and want to please others. We might hate saying no and 'letting them down'. People expect us to say yes and we might be afraid of their response, if we don't volunteer. But by taking on too much and stressing yourself out, you're not really helping anybody.

The first few times you say no, it will probably confuse people who had assumed you'd say yes – be prepared for that. And notice how quickly they start to respect the new boundaries you are creating. **Don't underestimate the life-changing potential of saying no, at least occasionally.**

So What?

Being aware of your personal stress type is enough to help you stop the auto-pilot pattern you would normally run.

You can catch yourself earlier in the process, so you can choose whether you really want to respond that way.

You might like to take a few minutes to make some notes about what you have learned, simply from identifying your stress type(s) – and what you might like to change?

Be sure to include who you could ask for help to make those changes, if you need it.

3. Discovering Your Christmas Stress Triggers

Most of us are pretty good at “doing” Christmas stress. And we tend to have our preferred things we get stressed about.

It might be not having enough time. It might be not having enough money. It might be worrying about other people’s expectations – or feeling responsible for them enjoying themselves over the Festive Season.

For example:

I know from experience that it can be more stressful, being a Christmas guest than a Christmas host, because you’re not in your own home. I used to be good at feeling obliged to do what I thought was expected of me. All too often it was all in my head!

Think for a moment about specific situations or tasks that stress you about Christmas and make a list of them here:

Keep it brief! This isn’t the time to dive back in to the drama!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Go back through your list, one item at a time.

- Can you spot the trigger?
- Are the situations really likely to happen?
- Are there any common threads?
- How many of these situations did you have any control over?
- Are you taking on someone else's stress?

Prioritise the main triggers and themes – up to a maximum of 3. Now you can focus on these specific points, as you make your way through the rest of this book.

You're much more likely to see results if you focus on just 2 or 3 specific changes, than if you try to change everything at once.

What have you learned from doing this exercise?

4. What are you worried about?

The funny thing about worrying is that it never fixed anything.

Yet it's a habit that so many of us are addicted to.

"Worrying is a great way of creating a future you don't want."

Esther Hicks

Add a dollop of Christmas Stress to the mix and worrying takes on a whole new dimension.

The thing is that, when we're worrying, we get stuck in our head, going over and over and round and round the thing that may never happen.

Worrying about it means we're giving it so much attention that we actually make it more likely to happen.

Yes, noticing we're worrying about something can 'nudge' us into taking action. But it's much more healthy just to get on and take that action, rather than stress about something in the future.

Worries take up so much effort and energy. Like hungry kids, they demand regular feeding and they're always on our mind. But worries aren't always a fair reflection of reality. They're normally an expression of our fears about what might happen, rather than something that will definitely happen.

Time To Get Active!

How about taking a moment to write down some of the things you're worried about this Christmas? Include everything – even the stuff that seems silly or small – that's just as likely to cause you stress as some of the bigger things.

For each worry you have written down, ask yourself 4 questions:

1. Is this REAL?

... or is there a chance it's just something you're imagining might happen?

2. Are your concerns about the consequences realistic?

... or are they perhaps a little out of proportion? Be honest!

3. Does it really matter?

... is the world going to stop turning? Is it really as big a deal as your mind is telling you? In six months' time, will anyone be bothered by it?

4. What could I do differently, so that this is no longer an issue?

Most worries can be fixed by changing our attitude – would this work for you on each of the worries you listed? What actions could you take, to “fix” this worry?

If it's something outside of your control, such as whether Auntie Beryl will argue with Grandpa, then you probably just have to let it go and book your ring-side seat.

But if it's something you can make a difference to, then taking even a baby step towards a solution can remove a heavy weight from your shoulders.

5. Want To Dump Your Christmas Baggage?

We all have baggage from Christmases past.

Whether it's memories of family events, the embarrassment of unwrapping yet another reindeer jumper or – in my Mum's case, dropping the ready-to-serve Christmas turkey...!

You can bet that the disasters of previous years come back to haunt us, as we worry or stress that they might happen again.

Fact: there's no such thing as a "perfect" Christmas.

Fact: Christmas past doesn't have to spoil Christmas present – or future.

But if we're dwelling on our Christmas baggage, then that's exactly what it will do.

What can you do instead?

1. Learn from what went wrong in the past.
2. Accept it. It happened. Whatever the consequences, it's done.
3. Let it go. Drag yourself back to the "here and now" and get on with enjoying this Christmas!

No matter how much of a disaster a previous Christmas was, there will have been positive aspects to it – or other Christmases.

Instead of dwelling on old memories that cause us pain (get help with them in the New Year!), how about turning things around?

How about catching yourself in the act of dwelling on Christmas baggage and choosing to throw in the happier memories instead?

If you do that for just one minute (60 seconds, that's all!) it will immediately lift your mood, helping you to feel calmer and happier. How about giving it a go?

6. Time For A Fresh Perspective?

We're all familiar about the cliché over wearing rose tinted glasses.

You can see it instantly with two people who have just fallen in love.

It's like a haze around them, where they are blind to each other's quirks and annoying habits and life seems to be full of song-birds.

Similarly, come across someone in a bad mood and you can almost see the black rain cloud they're dragging along with them.

“Our attitude towards what is going on around us is a critical factor for stress levels.”

Whilst nobody is suggesting that Pollyanna or Scrooge had all the answers, it is interesting to see how their perspective on life moulded their experience.

*“If we focus on what's going wrong, we experience more things going wrong.
If we focus on what's going right, we experience more things going right.”*

No matter how stressed we are feeling, we can always choose how to experience what's going on...

It's not a message that everyone wants to hear. But it's true!

How about trying it out for the next hour?

How about choosing only to notice the good, positive stuff, gently ignoring anything that goes wrong?

After the hour, what do you notice?

What happened?

How could you use this to help you this Christmas?

7. What's The Magic Question

Whatever you're doing right now, don't think of a blue donkey in a pink tree.

What happened?

Anyone out there who didn't imagine that donkey?

Why is that?

Because our unconscious mind – the bit that's running the show – finds it difficult to handle negatives. Tell it not to do something and it first has to imagine doing it and then add the “not”. But by that point the damage is done.

The other problem is that your unconscious mind often finds it hard to tell the difference between something you're imagining and something that's really happening. That's why our good memories feel so great when you re-live them.

So if we're spending all our time dwelling on what might go wrong and things that might not happen, our unconscious mind is creating the physical and emotional experience, as though they were actually happening right now.

That sounds pretty bad, eh?

To save yourself all that stress and bother, all you need to do is ask yourself one simple question – I call it “The Magic Question”:

"What do I want instead?"

Make sure you phrase it positively – stay away from “I want him to stop doing xyz!”. Make it something that is actually within your control!

Just shifting your focus in this way can cure the vast majority of stress.

It helps you shift your attention away from the drama and emotions of the problem, moving towards practical solutions.

In just five simple words.

What do I want instead?

No wonder it's called magic!

Ask the question, then take action.

I guarantee that using that as your Christmas Stress mantra will turn things around!

8. Remembering What It's All About

Sometimes when we're drowning in our to-do lists or suffocating under a hoard of long-lost family visitors, it can be easy to forget why we're bothering.

Christmas can turn into 12 days of hard work, lost sleep, peace-making, placating and stomach-churning stress.

Yet one of the easiest ways to turn things around is to remember why we're doing it all.

By remembering the reasons why, whatever it is we felt we had to do becomes something we choose to do. It's like it removes our resistance and things start to flow again.

To help you kick start this process, how about thinking about what is most important to you about Christmas? Be specific – then it will help you keep your perspective positive throughout the festivities.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

9. Creating Your Own Personal De-Stress Strategies

It's a fact that all of us have developed our own, personal de-stress strategies over the years – otherwise we'd all be climbing on the ceiling 24 hours a day.

The thing is that we often forget what they are.

Some of them might be as subtle as closing your eyes and going back inside yourself to reach a point of inner calm. Others might take more time and involve a walk in nature or a candlelit bath.

Whatever your favourite de-stress strategies are, how about brain storming some of them now? By writing them down, you'll find they easily come to mind when you're stressed over the Christmas period.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Perhaps you could go back to #3, with this new list, and see which of your favourite de-stress strategies might help?

10. The #1 Decision You Need To Make For A Stress-Free Christmas

Imagine the scenario:

It's a cold, frosty winter's morning and the school physical education teachers are huddling in their ski jackets in the staff room, while the rest of us drag our grumpy bodies resentfully around the cross country course.

The teachers might pop out in time to meet us at the finish line, but we're far from impressed.

With every half-frozen step, we are silently screaming objections to the task, yet we believe we have no choice.

Imagine the difference it might make if we simply accepted the way things were and decided to enjoy it?

Instead of focusing on the intense cold, we'd notice the patterns the frost was making on the leaves and perhaps even a bejewelled spider's web? We'd hear the crunch under foot and see the sun smiling gently from the clear blue sky.

We would get into the rhythm of the run and time would fly. We would know that it wouldn't last forever.

Whether we choose to hate the event or love it, it will last just as long – but our experience of it would be very different. You never know, we might even enjoy it!

It's the same with Christmas stress.

If we fight it and make a fuss, it gets bigger.

*As Carl Jung reminds us:
"What you resist persists."*

It's a generally accepted fact that we can't control what happens in life or how others behave. Yet fighting it can make things so much more complicated and painful than they need to be.

If we just accept the things we can't change and choose to enjoy the ride anyway, it can turn into a magical experience.

Summary

Christmas stress is very real for many people.

But there are so many things you can do to break free from old habits, go with the flow and even enjoy the process.

Ask for help in the New Year if stress is generally a big issue for you.

Hopefully this section has helped you understand your personal stress and de-stress strategies and given you some helpful ideas for making changes.

Are you ready to move on to dealing with the number one Christmas stress complaint?

How to find time for Christmas...

Part Two: Finding The Time For Christmas

Strategies 11-24

While I was researching this book, I did a survey, asking people what was stressing them about getting ready for Christmas. The unanimous answer was “Not having enough time to get everything done”.

Of course, there were plenty of other stress sources. But credit crunch or no, most people were stressed about not having enough time.

It’s obvious, when you think about it.

No longer is it enough just to give gifts and spend time with those we love.

- Nowadays our Christmas experience is made “easier” by 24/7 internet shopping.
- Our previously-cherished Christmas dinners have been rendered inadequate by a torrent of celebrity chefs who rustle up a 5 course meal for an entire city, without breaking a bead of sweat.
- Add a generous helping of TV programmes and books, reminding us that “artisan-style-home-made gifts” are the only appropriate option for our nearest and dearest and it’s no wonder that we’re feeling time-poor.

The we throw in the usual mix of late nights at Christmas parties and working extra hours, to make up for the Christmas break, and it’s no wonder we’re stressed and exhausted!

The great news is that there are ways to claw back your time – and even make some extra – to reduce your Christmas stress levels. So this section includes 14 different ways you can juggle life and find more time to fit everything in. Enjoy!

Enjoyed this sample?

Here's how to read more:

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now from Amazon

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What's Next?

So that's the end of our 101 Ways To De-Stress Your Christmas.

I really hope you have found some useful ideas as you have read through this book.

Hopefully the suggestions have given you some practical inspiration, to help you create a less stressful Christmas this year.

If you have found this book useful and would like to stay in touch, you could:

- Sign up for our monthly newsletter:
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- Remember to make the most of the resources that go with this book –
<http://www.destressyourchristmas.com/resources/>

Wishing you and yours a wonderful, stress-free Christmas and a year full of happiness and laughter in the coming year!

With love,

Clare Josa