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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

www.ClareJosa.com

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 chang-
ing 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!

11. Revisit Your ABC

If you're anything like me, your to-do lists run to multiple pages most of the time.

Personally, I tend to be great at starting things but rubbish at finishing them (though I promise to finish this book for you!).

This leads me to a big problem – having too many things on the go at once. And they can all feel like they're urgent.

They can scream at me, all wanting attention, like a hungry baby. And it can be exhausting.

One of the easiest ways to create more time is to choose to do less.

Ok, I can hear the yells of objection already, but please just stay with me a moment!

Generally, when it comes to Christmas, we can all be tempted to take on too much.

Whether it's creating hand-made cards for everyone, preparing a lavish 7 course Christmas lunch or arranging fresh rose petals on your guests' pillows...

Yet there will always be some things that are less important and they're the ones that need to wait quietly and patiently at the bottom of your to-do list, until you have more time (or till next year!).

There's a really simple method to prioritise things – it's the ABC technique. Chances are that you have come across it before, at work or college, but it's surprising how often we forget to apply it at home.

Here's a reminder:

1. Write out your to-do list, including any deadlines.
2. Go through each item and objectively ask yourself whether it ranks as:

- A: MUST be done (really!)
- B: Very important, but less so than A and could wait till another day
- C: Honestly – a nice to have

Each day, do all of the A items for that day first, then the B items and finally the C items.

*"Don't do today anything that could be
put off till tomorrow."*

If something in your "C-list" keeps bugging you, then either choose to get it done and over with, or get rid of it! Life is too short.

12. As Within, So Without

Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to be focused when you're surrounded by mess?

And rarely is that more true than when you are about to fill your home with Christmas decorations, guests and food.

"As within, so without."

Mess at home can be a warning of a cluttered or stressed mind.

And since we rarely have time to deal with the deeper depths of our unconscious mind in the run-up to Christmas, a quick fix is to deal with the 'as without' – our physical environment. It will really help any inner turmoil.

One of the easiest ways to avoid Christmas overwhelm is to have a clear-out.

It needn't take more than a few hours and it can have the miraculous effect of giving you a calm and stable base from which to plan your Christmas adventures.

Go round your home and put away everything that shouldn't be lying around. If it doesn't have a "home", find it one!

If you don't really want it any more, give it to a charity shop, so that someone else can enjoy it instead.

Have a clean up.

Give your home a good clean before you put up the decorations.

It's all about creating a sense of space and lightness, before the festivities begin.

Doing this before Christmas will make the next few weeks so much easier.

13. Why Multi-Tasking Might Be Your Worst Enemy

Ok, I have to confess that I am terrible at this one. Or rather I'm great at it, which is the real problem.

I'm a champion juggler, when it comes to my to-do list. You could even call me a grasshopper (and people have), as I jump from one thing to the next, whilst balancing the previous thing on one foot.

I love starting jobs, but I get very little satisfaction from finishing them. But not finishing things off does cause me stress...

I'm very fortunate to know some wonderful people who are amazing at what psychologists call being a "completer-finisher" – in other words they get deep satisfaction from completing a project. So I've been able to see how much difference it can make to stress levels.

At Christmas, when you're likely to be taking multi-tasking to near-Olympic gold medal heights, finishing tasks is vital.

That means wrapping up the final present and then putting the paper away.

That means writing that final Christmas card address on the envelope and actually posting it, rather than leaving it languishing, guiltily, till January.

The opposite of multi-tasking is finishing one job before you start the next.

It might feel boring, but you'll quick learn to love the release you feel as you let the completed task go and tick it off your list.

*"Nothing beats the satisfaction of
ticking a job off a list."*

- It's about being present in the 'here and now', rather than doing one thing while thinking about the next.
- It's about laser-focus. It's about efficiency.
- It's ultimately about de-stressing!

And it's only for Christmas, after all!

14. How To Spot Your Secret Time Stealers

You're in the middle of Christmas preparations and the phone rings. Half an hour later the kids demand a snack, then you spot the ironing, a few unpaid bills and catch up on your emails or Facebook. Before you know it the day has gone.

Time stealers are a fact of life.

*But they rarely come with the warning
they deserve.*

They tend, instead, to sneak up on us without us realising, overstaying their welcome and rarely saying thank you for the care we lavished on them.

No one is suggesting that the kids should stay hungry or that bills should fester. But you can be clever about how you manage these interruptions.

Sometimes delaying dealing with them for just 10 minutes can give you the space to finish a job and cut your stress levels.

Sometimes having set times each day to deal with emails / bills / phone calls can be a useful tactic.

A bit of planning can have a huge impact.

Each of us will have developed ways we can squeeze these kinds of jobs, to get on with the “real stuff”.

What could you do today, to reduce the impact of your regular time stealers?

15. When Multi-Tasking Might Be A Good Idea

Yes, I know I said in #13 that multi-tasking can be a bad thing, but it all depends on how you do it!

If you put your mind to it, it's amazing how effortlessly you can create more time by doing two things at once. I call it "low effort multi-tasking", because it's about combining two low effort activities, so you can still feel relaxed, rather than juggling multiple complex tasks.

Are there any areas of "dead time" that you have during the day?

- Could you make that quick phone call while you're cooking dinner?
- Could you write those cards while you're watching TV? (Or turn off the TV!)
- Could you browse recipe books for your Christmas menu while the kids are doing their homework?
- Could you wrap the presents, while you're chatting with friends?

How could you make the most of multi-tasking, to make Christmas easier?

16. Creating Christmas Plans That Work

This one sounds obvious, but if you're just days away from Christmas, then it might sound too late.

But it's never too late!

If you're stressed about everything you have to do, then planning ahead can take the emotions out of it and free up your time.

There's an old cliché:

"Fail to plan and you plan to fail."

Yet it's true.

Unfortunately, the best laid plans will never turn into reality, unless you act on them...

Nobody is suggesting you should carry out your Christmas plan with military precision, but having at least an outline plan of what needs to be done when is a great way of helping you focus and also spot where you might need to ask for help.

And it makes sure you won't still be trying to buy parsnips and Brussels Sprouts on Christmas Eve...

The most common objections to planning are that it takes too much time – or it stops you being flexible.

But planning can actually save you time, by helping you to stay focussed, to prioritise and to avoid having to repeat jobs or fix mistakes. And if you use your plan as a foundation, rather than a constraint, then it can free you up to be more flexible, when things change.

Where are you stuck?

What makes the biggest difference to a Christmas plan is a good balance. If we let our emotions, thoughts and physical actions get out of balance, that's when the problems start.

Emotions: if we spend too much time feeling stressed, we often fail to plan or take action.

Thinking: if we spend too much time planning and thinking, we often forget to take action or consider the emotional side of things.

Doing: if we spend too much time doing, we often lose out because we didn't plan properly.

Do you need to get back in balance? What might need to shift for you? Are you spending too much time thinking? Feeling? Doing?

17. Won't It Wait till January?

Some things really will wait.

I know... We've all been there... Auntie Janice is coming and you really want the spare room to look its best, so you've set yourself the task of giving it a lick of paint and new curtains before she arrives.

But now it is seeming impossible, fights are breaking out over it at home and everyone is miserable.

Even if Aunt Jane is the kind of person who would pass comment on your existing colour scheme, does it really matter?

If she loves you, then it will be you that she has come to see, not the room.

And if she passes judgemental comments, then remember the old Native American Indian saying:

*"All criticism is borne of someone else's
pain."*

If she can criticise your room, then just imagine how much she is giving herself a hard time, inside her head. Instead of retaliating, how about giving her a smile, mentally sending her love and letting it go? After all, it is Christmas!

Aside: Being kind in the face of her criticism could be just the Christmas present she needs.

For the sake of your health and your enjoyment of Christmas, there are bound to be some things that will wait till January. Can you think of any???

18. When “Done” Is Good Enough

An old mentor of mine used to say that:

*"Done and good enough" is better than
"perfect and not quite finished."*

Perfectionism is a trait that runs through many of us and rarely more so than at Christmas.

It shows itself in so many different ways, but it always has a common theme – it causes stress.

Whilst we might long to get Christmas absolutely perfect, if a few things drop off the table (metaphorically!), chances are no one will notice.

Are there any areas of your Christmas planning where you might be going a bit too far?

How about going back to #11 and doing some prioritising?

What could you let go of? How much less stressed would you feel?

Surely it's worth it?

19. You Wouldn't Eat An Elephant...

We have probably all heard the saying:

"You wouldn't eat an elephant in one go."

And the famous quote from Lao Tzu:

"A journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step."

Well, both of these apply to Christmas!

We get overwhelmed when we look at what we need to do and see it as a mountain, looming over us.

Yet nobody leaps from base camp to the summit in one go.

Breaking things down into simple, bite-sized chunks can make a dramatic difference to your stress levels and your likelihood of actually getting them done!

Are there any aspects of your Christmas planning that could do with being split into manageable chunks?

Which baby steps could you take right now, to make some gentle progress?

20. It's Ok To Fake It!

Even if organisation isn't really your thing, how about faking it, just for Christmas?

Do you have a friend or colleague who is well organised? What could you learn from them about it?

- How does an organised person think?
- What do they do?
- How do they feel?
- Which strategies do they employ?

For example:

- Doing things in bulk is a great way to create more time and finish things off.
- Wrap all your presents in one evening and make an event of it, rather than doing a few each night and perhaps dreading it.
- Do all your food shopping in bulk – then it's done. You could even shop online for it to be delivered or take advantage of counting sheep at 3 a.m. in the local supermarket.
- Give yourself a set amount of time to do your Christmas gift shopping, rather than going back day after day for more...

If you're feeling disorganised, how about revisiting #18 on planning or #11 on prioritising? Or maybe your home has become chaotic and #12 would help?

How could you get more organised and streamline your pre-Christmas jobs?

21. The One Little Word Can Create Time

Ok, so this one is a toughie for many of us.

There's no point in softening the blow or wrapping it up in gift paper with a pretty bow. Here's the one little word you need to say, to dramatically increase your time and cut your Christmas stress: No.

Yes, I said "Say no!"

- Say no to extra hours at work.
- Say no to extra gift shopping.
- Say no to extra parties.
- Say no to ironing (my personal favourite!)
- Say no to anything that doesn't feel like it "belongs to you" – anything that isn't really your job.

A friend of mine used to say:

*"If you want something to get done,
give it to a busy person."*

And there's an element of truth in that, unless the busy person is about to crack, in which case things can get very messy.

So if you're in the middle of everything and someone comes to you with yet another request, take a moment to stop and think about whether you really want to take it on. And if you don't, play with politely, but firmly, saying no!

They might be shocked, but it's often the kindest thing to do.

22. Too Stressed To Think Straight?

Are you panicking about Christmas? Too stressed to think straight?

It's amazing how much time this one can take up.

Give yourself a break and go back to #10 and play with some of your personal de-stress strategies.

Or you could try simply writing down what you're panicking about. That often helps you see the answers that will free you up to get on with things.

Usually the panicking takes more time than doing the things you're panicking about.

But sometimes it still helps to enlist a good friend to listen for ten minutes and help you see a way forwards.

One word of warning, though:

Make sure you resist the temptation of turning into a Drama Queen. Keeping things factual and letting go of the emotions can really help you get things out of your system, without raising your stress levels.

23. Walking The Plank

This exercise is simple, fun and effective.

And it's a great one for any time – not just Christmas.

It's a great way of setting your intentions for an event and for dealing with any low-level fears that might be lurking. You walk in a straight line – a bit like walking the plank – but the outcome is much more useful!

1. Decide what the major goals are in this year's Christmas strategy (e.g. presents bought & wrapped, food bought, invitations sent, etc.)
2. Find a place where you can walk in a long, straight line.
3. Standing at one end of the line, look towards the far end, which is the end of Christmas.
4. Now slowly walk along the line, imagining each of the things you will have accomplished by that point in time, until you reach Christmas.

As you walk, notice any resources you might need. These could be in the form of qualities, such as “patience” or “organisational skills”; or they could be physical help and support you might need from someone else.

5. At each stage, pause and imagine yourself receiving these resources, before you move on, knowing it's all going to be ok.

Continued...

6. Keep going until you have gone one step beyond Christmas and look back at the “now”. Notice everything you have achieved. How are you feeling?
7. Walk back from Christmas to “now”, noticing any points where you feel you might need even more resources (patience, love, courage, time – whatever you need!) and stop at each of those points, to “give yourself” that resource.
8. Standing back in the “now”, how different are you feeling?

If any special points came up for you in this exercise, it can be great to write them down.

It’s a lovely exercise to do each morning, to plan your day.

24. Time To Chill Out?

Being tense isn't just in your mind, it's in your body too.

It sends the body into “fight or flight” mode by engaging the sympathetic nervous system and pumping your system full of stress hormones.

This means we can be running on adrenaline and creating massive stress for our bodies.

It's no wonder we feel stressed!

Learning how to relax, be it for a few moments or 20 minutes, can make a huge difference.

It will help you de-stress, feel calmer, be more focused and even feel like you have more time!

The most common reason people give for not relaxing is a lack of time – but, ironically, being relaxed gives you more energy, better mental clarity and means it's easier to get things done more efficiently!

If you would like a guided deep relaxation, to take you through 20 minutes of deeply releasing stress and tension, as well as building up more energy, then you might like to check out the resources section of this book's website:

www.clarejosa.com/christmas/relax

Summary

Hopefully this section has given you some useful ideas on how to create (or find) more time this Christmas.

If there are any of the strategies that you have found particularly useful, writing notes about them will help you remember them, whenever you're feeling stressed.

Are you ready to move on to the next section?

Strategies For Staying Sane

Part Three: Strategies For Staying Sane

Strategies 25 - 50

Christmas has a way of creating stress and drama that few other times of year can manage.

It sends us into super-stress faster than you could wink at a flying bat and keeps us there until long into the New Year.



Sometimes, when we're stressed, it can be hard to think straight. Even simple tasks can feel as though they're insurmountable.

So I thought it might be useful to share with you a whopping 28 strategies for staying sane this Christmas.

They are a mixture of physical exercises and simple breathing techniques that you can do in less than five minutes, to help you shift that stress.

And most of them are really quick fixes.

With that many to choose from, there's bound to be one that's perfect for you!

25. Don't forget to sleep

Duh! I hear you say...

But I'm being serious!

There's something about getting ready for Christmas that sends us into late-night mania. We discover that fitting in work, parties, presents and more means we're not only burning the candle at both ends, we've discovered a way to burn it in the middle.

*"But even Santa only stays up all night
once a year."*

And you want to enjoy Christmas, don't you?

Getting enough sleep has to be a priority for at least some of the Christmas period.

Sure, there will be late nights, but making it a habit will quickly lead to you feeling exhausted, ratty, miserable and struggling to think straight – a feeling that could last long after the festivities are over.

So off you go! Time to get some shut-eye.

And if sleeping isn't working so well for you, read on to #26.

26. Sweet Dreams Strategy

What can you do, if you're too stressed to sleep?

I regularly work with mentoring clients who have this problem.

They lie awake, desperate to fall asleep, but their mind is racing and they simply can't switch off.

It doesn't matter how many different, supremely complicated relaxation techniques they try, they "can't get no sleep!"

One of the strategies I recommend to them is so simple yet highly effective:

*If you're too stressed to sleep, write it
all down, so you can let go of it till the
morning.*

Then let it go!

If your mind is keeping you awake, it's only because it's finally got your attention and wants to make sure you remember everything it wants you to do.

Writing it down and committing to yourself that you'll deal with it when you're feeling refreshed in the morning is a great way to let go and switch off.

How about giving it a go?

27. Beware What You're Expecting

If you expect the worst, then that's what you're likely to get.

You'll become acutely aware of anything that's not going to plan and you'll react to it more strongly than necessary.

Yet that's the way most of us go when we're stressed.

Yes, it's important to acknowledge our fears or concerns, but not to let them run the Christmas show. Dwelling on them is a fast way to a negative spiral.

Something as simple as anticipating the positive things that are going to happen will help you break the cycle.

We're not talking Pollyanna here.

It's about allowing the good bits to filter through, rather than just the doom and gloom.

How about catching yourself at it, one thought at a time? It's not about beating yourself up if that thought is negative. It's about choosing to follow it with a more positive one, until that becomes a new habit.

If you have planned and taken action, then it's perfectly reasonable to expect things to go well. And it's much more fun than fearing disaster!

You might be surprised at the difference it will make.

28. If You Don't Enjoy It, Don't Do It! OR see #29...

*If you're not enjoying something, don't
do it.*

Yes, I can hear you!

"But I have to!"

Do you? Really?

Couldn't someone else do it?

Does it really need to be done?

I'm just asking...

Still not sure? Then check out #29.

29. Even If You Don't Want To Do It, You Could Choose To Enjoy It!

Does that sound a bit loopy?

Here's a silly example of how it can work:

I don't much like taking out the compost.

It's not that I'm squeamish (though I am a bit, if I'm honest).

It's more that it's mucky, smelly and a bit blurgh!

If I get myself into the state where I feel I have to do it, then I'm really good at grumbling my way through.

But if I turn things round and make it a game – something I can enjoy – then it seems to be over before I know it.

Make it fun, whatever it is you need to “choose” to enjoy.

*"Remember: we can't always choose
the circumstances, but we can always
choose how we react."*

Are there any aspects of your Christmas planning that might benefit from the “choose to enjoy it” treatment?

30. A Little Bit Of What You Fancy...

When we're stressed, it's easy to forget to do things we enjoy – things that make us feel good.

Indulging in something that makes you feel good, every day, is a good way to stay happy through Christmas stress.

Whether it's a short walk or listening to some music we love, doing even just 5 minutes of something we enjoy can recharge our batteries and help us feel calmer, more energised and happier.

Making a list of things you really enjoy and picking one at random is a great strategy.

Could you spare 5 minutes to enjoy yourself doing that right now?

31. No One Can Make You Feel Stressed

Eleanor Roosevelt is quoted as saying:

“No one can make you feel inferior, without your consent.”

And the same goes for stress.

No one but you can make you feel stressed.

Inanimate objects like Christmas cards and wrapping paper find it especially challenging!

Yet that’s how we talk about it:

“Finding a present for Uncle Tom is making me so stressed!”

Sure, other people can give us plenty of ammunition, but at the end of the day, it’s always our choice, how to react.

For some, that statement is obvious and intuitive, whilst for others it might be like running into a brick wall.

But it’s a fact of life.

If you’re stressed, you’re doing it to yourself. And the great news is that it means you can undo it too. How about working through the rest of the steps in this section to create your own, personal de-stress strategies?

32. If What You're Doing Isn't Working...

If what you're doing isn't working, do something different.

It always makes me giggle whenever I go to London and see foreign visitors following someone who has used an Oyster card through the underground barriers.

The visitor will invariably watch the Oyster card user in front of them carefully, then take their manual tube ticket and place it on the Oyster card reader, expecting the barrier to let them through.

When it doesn't, they look confused and try again.

Only when someone comes to offer help do they learn that their ticket goes into the slot on the front of the barrier instead.

What they were doing wasn't working, but they kept on doing it. And we all do it!

We even have a saying about it:

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again."

But that only works if you get flexible.

If what you're doing isn't working and you keep doing it, it's likely to keep not working.

Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is clearly not rational, but it's something we're all very good at! In fact, psychologists often joke that it's the first sign of insanity!

So if what you're doing isn't working, try doing something different...

Go on, I dare you!

33. Don't Beat Yourself Up

Sometimes things don't work out quite the way you had planned – and Christmas is no exception.

So if you notice that you're starting to beat yourself up about something, how about:

- giving that inner critic a break?
- sending them on holiday?
- turning down the volume?
- telling them you've got the message?
- asking them to use a kinder voice?

Learning from your mistakes is important, but so is moving on and enjoying the present moment.

Even just turning off that inner voice for a few minutes might be the best gift you give yourself this Christmas – and beyond!

34. Don't Sweat The Small Stuff

Tony Robbins is famously quoted as saying:

*"Don't sweat the small stuff...
and it's all small stuff."*

And there's a lot of truth in that.

If you're feeling seriously Christmas stressed, how about asking yourself if it really matters?

If it's tricky to work it out, here's a really quick technique you can use:

1. Close your eyes.
2. Take a deep breath in and then breathe out with an "ahhh" sound, allowing yourself to relax.
3. Imagine Christmas has been and gone and look back at the thing you're stressed about now.
4. After Christmas, will it have mattered?

If yes, then do something about it.

If no, then how about letting it go?

35. Putting Down Some Roots

When we're stressed, it's all too easy to disappear off into our heads.

It's like we're floating around in our own little stress bubble.

Not only does that feel pretty rubbish, but it makes it hard to get anything done.

One of the easiest ways to literally come back to earth is to get grounded.

1. Stand up straight, with your body relaxed.
2. Imagine roots are growing from the soles of your feet, deep into the ground.
3. Really feel them growing deeper and deeper, until you feel firmly anchored.
4. Take a deep breath in, expanding your belly to allow your diaphragm to work.
5. As you breathe out with a sigh, allow tension and worry to flow out through those roots and into the earth.
6. 6. Repeat this for at least 3 breaths.

Notice how different you feel?

36. Take A Hike

When we're stressed, we tend to slouch and our breathing moves up to our upper chest and throat.

This means our body isn't getting enough oxygen and it makes everything more difficult.

Posture impacts our mental state and emotions.

Try it out!

Sitting down, slouch – let your head drop – have a good frown.

Now think of something happy.

If you really concentrate on the happy thought, you'll find yourself starting to sit up straighter and smile.

Mind, body and emotions are inextricably linked.

Sometimes the simple action of going out for a walk can re-oxygenate your body and give you a fresh perspective.

It doesn't matter whether you live in a city or in the countryside and it doesn't have to be a full day's trek. Even just ten minutes of walking outside is enough to shift your mood and get things back into perspective.

The deeper breathing improves your oxygen levels and clears your mind. The physical movement releases tension and re-energises you. Surely that's better than staying stuck in your stress?

37. It's Boogie Time!

Personally, I love this one – though my neighbours probably don't.

If I'm feeling stressed, I love to put on my favourite music and dance and sing to my heart's content!

It only takes 5 minutes and it will shake up your body, get you breathing deeply and release endorphins into your blood stream, which are your body's natural way of helping you feel good.

If getting active is one of the ways you like to de-stress, then this will be a great one for you.

And even if it's not the kind of thing you'd usually do, how about giving it a go?

It's easy to build into your Christmas schedule. Singing while you're cooking, wrapping, cleaning or creating relieves stress and adds to the fun!

38. Stretch It Out

Tension gets stored in our body and makes it hard to think straight.

If you don't have time for a walk or to get dancing and singing (#36 and #37), then some simple stretching can be enough.

Obviously, work within your own comfortable limits...

Start by stretching your arms above your head and giving a big yawn – your body's way of getting more oxygen in!

Then, if you're somewhere that you can stand up, increase the stretch through your back and your legs, building up to standing on your toes, if you can.

Clench your hands into tight fists and then release them. Do this a few times.

Finally scrunch your face up tight and let it go. Then open your eyes and mouth wide, to give them a good stretch – and let go.

Doesn't take long, does it?

Feeling better?

39. Time For A Drink?

Dehydration has a massive impact on our body, our mental clarity and our emotions. Research shows that many of us are dehydrated, much of the time.

How about turning things around for yourself over the Christmas period? If your favourite drinks usually include caffeine, sugar or sweeteners, even just adding an extra 3 or 4 glasses of water a day will make a tremendous difference.

If you'd like to find out more about how dehydration affects your body, mind and stress levels, then "Your body's many cries for water" is a really useful and inspiring read:

<http://tinyurl.com/givemewater>

40. Are You Sitting Comfortably?

1. Take a moment to sit in a chair.
2. Now say out loud the phrase, “tired and weak” five times, really feeling it in your body.
3. Now try to stand up. Does it take a lot of effort?
4. Sitting down again, repeat 5 times the phrase, “powerful and strong”.
5. Now stand up.
6. Did you nearly shoot half way across the room?

"The stories we tell ourselves in our minds don't just impact our emotions, they also impact our bodies."

And it works the other way, too.

So if you're feeling tired and fed up, try sitting up straight, putting a smile on your face and noticing the subtle difference that will instantly make to your mood and your stress levels.

41. Take A Deep Breath

If you ever watch a sleeping baby breathe, you'll see that its belly rises and falls, with each gentle breath. There's none of this "holding your stomach in" to create that "ironing board" or "6 pack" outline. It relaxes and does what comes naturally.

Most of us "grown-ups" breathe from our upper chest and throat, particularly when we're stressed.

Yet our diaphragm is actually at the bottom of our rib cage and that's where our breathing movement comes from.

As you breathe in, your diaphragm moves down, expanding the lungs and effortlessly drawing in air. As you breathe out, it moves back upwards, gently expelling the old air. If we breathe from our chests or shoulders, instead of our bellies, then the intercostal muscles end up doing all that work instead. So not only are we not breathing properly, but we're putting too much effort in, it can make us feel tired and the reduced oxygen supply increases the effect.

Most of us do this back to front, without even realising. It's called 'paradoxical breathing'.

I remember back in the days when I was learning to drive, if I tried to take the car through a gap that was slightly too small, my driving instructor would say,

"Breathe in"

And I would feel myself trying to squeeze my body (and the car) to be smaller and make it through the space.

It's a phrase we commonly use to mean, "get smaller".

But it's really the other way round. If you breathe in, you get bigger. You breathe out and get smaller.

“Correct” breathing can make a huge difference to your stress levels and health. Most of us are just stuck in lazy habits. Luckily turning things around is quick and easy.

To re-energise yourself and de-stress, simply take a few breaths from your diaphragm area.

[Note: check with your medical professional if you have a medical condition that affects your breathing, before you try deep breathing exercises.]

1. Notice where your breath is currently resting – is it your belly, your chest, your shoulders or even your throat?
2. Put your hands flat on your belly, around the area of your diaphragm, with your fingertips touching.
3. As you breathe in, your belly expands and your fingertips move apart.
4. As you breathe out, your belly contracts and your fingertips move back together.
5. Continue this, gently and in a relaxed manner, for up to 5 minutes (or the rest of the day, if you prefer!)

Really feel the breath filling your whole lungs.

Doing this for just a few minutes will shift your mood and give you more energy. And it's free!

42. Magic Hands And Feet

Ancient Chinese medicine has long told us that there are acupuncture points all over the body. Many other disciplines tell us the same.

But did you know that your hands and feet contain points that link directly to every part of the body?

So giving yourself a good hand or foot massage can create the same level of relaxation and well-being as a full body massage.

In fact, holistic health experts like Dr Deepak Chopra recommend giving yourself a foot massage every morning. (Find out more about Deepak Chopra <http://amzn.to/2012deepakchopra>)

How about playing with this one and see what works for you?

It's a great 5-minute pick-me-up.

43. Can You Wiggle Your Ears?

Paul Dennison, founder of Brain Gym (<http://amzn.to/brain-gym>), advocates this type of exercise as a way to wake up your body and get everything moving again.

The theory is that all the main acupressure points in the body are mirrored in the ears. So by giving your ears a good rub, you're doing the equivalent of a body massage.

But be warned, it'll give you red ears for a while!

It works if you do both ears at once:

Use your finger tips to give your ears a massage. Start at the tops, gently uncurling the folds, and work your way round until you're tugging gently on your ear lobes.

Give your ears a stretch, pull, rub and general massage!

Do this for a couple of minutes and it'll leave you feeling invigorated and less stressed.

I know it sounds weird, but it really works. I regularly use it with my meditation students, especially if they arrive to class seeming tense and tired. It really wakes them up and refreshes them.

I don't expect you to believe me – try it out for yourself!

44. How Big Is Your Molehill?

Building mountains out of a mole hill?

Creating a storm in a teacup?

Whatever happens this Christmas, taking a step back, widening your perspective and giving yourself some space to see what's really going on will help you keep your stress levels down.

Keep stuff in perspective.

It's a matter of choosing to do it. And it can really help you let go of your stress.

45. Moving On Up (The Emotional Scale)

[Anyone else humming Yazz at this point?!]

Sometimes when we're feeling fed up, stressed or down, we put ourselves under pressure to make a huge emotional leap from negativity to joy and happiness.

The problem with this is it isn't lasting. Yes, you can make a quantum leap, but you're likely to head back down that slippery ladder pretty fast.

You're much better off going up the emotional scale one run at a time.

And the great news is that it's much easier to do, that way.

All you need to do is reach for a thought that makes you feel a little bit better, bringing you relief. Then reach for another one. And another one. And you'll soon be moving on up that emotional scale.

*"The only emotion you ever need to
aim for is relief."
Esther Hicks*

Esther Hicks teaches this process beautifully in her book "The Astonishing Power Of Emotions" – an essential read for anyone who wants to feel happier more often!

<http://tinyurl.com/estherhicks>

46. Smile Your Way Happier

Frowning takes more muscles than smiling.

It's a biological fact.

Yet so many of us spend more energy frowning than smiling...

If you want to feel better fast, smile.

The cool bit is that it doesn't matter if you're faking it, when you start.

Just give a great big grin and start thinking about happier things. Keep it going for just over a minute and your body will start to release all the chemicals it would be releasing if you really were happy.

And the best bit is that these chemicals actually make you feel happy.

So smiling, even if you're down, will make you happy.

*Want to turn up the smile dial?
Smile at someone else!*

If you smile at another person (with no expectation of a smile in return), you're probably going to lift their mood, as well as your own.

Smiles are contagious.

Isn't that something worth knowing?

47. Are You Wearing Your Shoulders As Ear Rings?

We store a huge amount of tension in our shoulders.

In fact, I often wonder whether mine are physically touching my ears...

This tension interrupts the free flowing of all the body's energy systems between the brain and the rest of the body and it can make us feel tired and low. It can make it hard to think clearly, which can lead to even more stress.

The easiest way to release this tension is to lift your shoulders right up to your ears (or as far as they'll comfortably reach!) while you breathe in. Hold them there for a second, then let them drop down as you breathe out with an 'ahhhh' sound.

[Note: be careful if you have neck or back problems]

Do this 5 times and notice the difference.

It's a great de-stresser!

Smile while you're doing it (see #46) for an extra bonus!

48. Create Your Own Stress Relief Toolkit

Sometimes it's good to inspire others – and sometimes it's good to be inspired by others' ideas.

So if you have some great stress-relievers that work for you, how about sharing them with your friends?

You might pick up some new ideas, too.

My top tip for you is to have a special place to write down the ideas that work for you. That way, next time you're stressed, you don't have to remember the techniques. They'll be there waiting for you.

And you don't have to leave them for Christmas. It's a great idea to have a radar for these strategies all year round.

49. Seeing The Light?

There are usually plenty of candles around at Christmas.

And if you're really stressed and need a super-fast de-stress option, then the simple act of sitting still, dimming the lights and gently allowing your focus to rest of the flame of a candle can bring you back to a place of inner calm that you might not have known you had!

It really is that easy.

It's a great way of relaxing, clearing your mind and improving your concentration levels. Plus the light of the candle acts on the pineal gland in your brain (the bit that impacts S.A.D.), helping to balance the hormones and even help you feel happier!

If you find this technique works for you, then you might enjoy meditation. Check out #50, to find out more.

P.S. If you suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, then you might like to check out the book "How To Beat The Winter Blues" – more details in the resources section:

www.clarejosa.com/Christmas/relax

50. 2 Minute Magical Meditation

If stress is a regular problem for you, then taking up a regular practice of deep relaxation or even meditation can make a tremendous difference.

And it's not all about turning yourself into a pretzel and chanting "om", though that is always an option!

A really simple 2 minute meditation goes as follows:

1. Sit comfortably, with your back straight, your shoulders relaxed and your chin tucked gently under.
2. Become aware of your breathing. Don't do anything to change it, just let your focus rest of your breath.
3. Silently observe the physical sensations as you breathe in energy and vitality.
4. Silently observe the physical sensations as you breathe out stress and tension.
5. Continue for at least 2 minutes, though 10 minutes would be great, too.
6. If your mind wanders, gently guide it back to focussing on your breath.

Summary

Hopefully this section has inspired you to try out a few new ways of staying sane at times of stress, whether it's Christmas or not.

Trying out the techniques a few times is a fun way of discovering which you'll enjoy – and which will work best for you.

If you would like to discover more resources that can help you to relax, included specially-designed deep relaxation CDs, make sure you check out this books website:

www.clarejosa.com/Christmas/relax

Moving on to more practical jobs, are you ready to tackle last-minute stress for presents, cards and decorating?

Part Four: Presents, Cards & Decorating

Strategies 51 - 63

And now we're moving into whistle-stop tour mode.

Christmas is nearly upon us and there's plenty still left to do.



Whether you're someone who does it all in advance or leaves it all until Christmas Eve, sorting out the practical side of Christmas can be stressful.

So here are 13 fast and effective ways to dump the Christmas stress when it comes to presents, cards and decorating.

51. Shop Online

It's not too late! You can still get some great gifts online, but do watch out for the last Christmas posting dates.

Shopping online is a useful way to avoid the stress and queues.

But have a list and budget in mind, before you hit the internet, or you're likely to over-indulge...

52. Budgets Don't Have To Be Boring

Yes, it might be Christmas, but that's no excuse to spend more than you can afford.

You know you'll only regret it in the New Year. Yes, I know we all splurge a bit at Christmas, but resisting the temptation can prevent extra stress in January.

Maybe there are areas where you could cut back without anyone noticing, so you can more easily afford those special treats?

You might need to manage people's expectations? And remember: "failing" to "keep up with the Joneses" is less embarrassing than having the extreme of those same neighbours seeing a bailiff pop round, come the spring...

Having a budget can help you get more creative and get maximum value for your money.

53. It's Not About How Much You Spend.

It's about the love that goes into choosing the present...

Try not to get trapped in the stress of “but I've given so-and-so something worth that much and I now have to buy something for their partner, worth the same amount.”

It's not a competition.

Buy your gift (or make it – yeah right!) with love and forget about the price. It's the love that counts.

And if it doesn't for that person, you probably shouldn't be buying them a present anyway...

54. Become A List Addict

Christmas present shopping quickly gets out of control if you're not organised.

I'm sure you already have a list of what you're giving to whom? Ok, I don't yet and it can still cause me stress! Lists are the easiest way to be sensible and not overspend, whilst avoiding the embarrassment of forgetting anyone...

So write those lists. Stick them somewhere safe. And then you don't need to overload a potentially addled Christmas brain by having to remember it all!

55. Do You Really Want To Send Cards This Year?

My frequent trick is to buy loads of Christmas cards and then realise the last posting date has passed and I haven't sent any!

I then end up feeling guilty and embarrassed – and I notice that people sulk with me...

But what if you're too stressed to get your cards done?

Well, you could do what one of my relatives does and write them in the summer, but I have to admit they might end up lacking a certain Christmas warmth...

Or how about sending Happy New Year cards instead?

Or not sending any at all and making a donation to charity, instead?

Or how about something really different? Remember the excitement of getting birthday cards when you're a kid? Why is it that the older you get, the less of them you receive?

How about sending birthday cards throughout the year, instead of Christmas cards? You'll be cutting your Christmas stress levels, plus it's a chance to properly connect with loved ones and include an individual message.

56. Roping In Santa's Elves

You don't have to do it all yourself.

Even Santa has elves.

Even if those around you seem reluctant to help, there are fun and creative ways you could persuade them to join in.

For example, Christmas decorating can be really good fun, if you get family or friends involved. How about throwing a "cup of tea and tree decorating" party?

My next door neighbours from when I was a kid create the most incredible Christmas Grotto in every room of their house.

They have a chorus of singing, bell-ringing monks, a full-sized laughing Santa and every wall and ceiling is covered in dark blue crepe paper, with thousands of delicate silver stars.

For kids, it really is quite magical. But it takes them so long to do!

Nowadays they use it to raise money for their local charities.

But you don't have to go that far.

If you're stressed, don't put yourself under pressure. Decide how much decorating you want to do, allot a time for it and enjoy it.

As for other aspects of Christmas that might be stressing you: how about taking 5 minutes to job down some key areas now where you'd secretly like some help?

How could you get creative about roping in some elves?

57. Do You Really Feel You Have To Give Presents?

Does that sound like a silly question?

Yet how often do we stop to really consider whether we want to give a gift to a particular person, or whether we feel we ought to?

A TV presenter was interviewed recently about her present-buying habits. The number of people she felt she had to buy for was scary. It started with immediate family and friends, then extended to work colleagues, God children, their families and beyond.

It made me wonder how she managed the whole thing – or whether her PA did it?

The fact is, if we're giving presents, for example, to say thank you, then we can do that at any time of the year – and it's likely to be more appreciated.

There's a growing trend for people to give money to charity, instead of buying Uncle Jim yet another pair of dark grey socks.

Maybe that would work for you this year?

Friends of mine try a different tactic – they do all their Christmas shopping in the January sales and give people New Year presents instead. Or you could give them 'promises' of future help or treats – see #58.

Just because there are expectations and traditions, it doesn't mean you have to follow them. If it's not working for you, then try something different.

Just make sure you warn people in advance, so they won't get grumpy!

58. Christmas And The Credit Crunch

Money is tight for many people this year, so buying expensive (and potentially unwanted) gifts is a challenge.

How about getting creative, instead?

Making gifts, if that's your thing, or offering the gift a service, such as cooking dinner, washing their car or babysitting, can be a great way of giving people something special, without maxing out your credit card.

And it's often more deeply appreciated than a shop-bought gift.

Honesty is important. Just think how bad you would feel if you received a gift from someone, only to find out they were left strapped for cash, as a result. If bought presents aren't going to work for you this year, how about taking the brave step of being honest with your loved ones?

*Good relationships are based on truth,
not embarrassed silence.*

59. People Want Love, Not Presents

If you're really broke, really stressed or just plain fed up with present shopping, remember that people want love, not presents.

Is there another way you can show them how much you care?

That could be the greatest gift they ever receive.

60. Believe people when they say they don't want presents!

A friend of mine mentioned this one – and it's tricky.

Each year, someone in her family will decide they've either got too much clutter or they would rather make a charitable gesture and they'll announce they're "not doing presents this year."

That's all well and good until you're sitting round the Christmas tree, gleefully unwrapping everyone else's gifts and the "not doing presents" person's face is slowly dropping.

You get the impression they didn't really mean it and they would really have loved a present.

So you're stuck.

You did what they asked, but now you're riddled with guilt.

What's the answer?

Well, that's up to you. But if they made the decision that they didn't want presents, then that's a choice they chose to make. It's not up to you to make them feel better, if they're regretting it.

You can still make sure they feel special and loved by making a fuss of them and showing them you care.

61. Fancy A “Buy Nothing” Christmas?

<http://www.buynothingchristmas.org>

This is a useful website, packed with ideas of what to do if you don't want to buy anything this Christmas.

It's got a lively discussion forum, too.

So if you're stuck for ideas, how about checking it out?

<http://www.buynothingchristmas.org/alternatives/index.html>

62. Just Make A Decision!

Going round and round in circles, struggling to figure out what to buy for everyone? How about just making a decision?!

Then stick to it.

Finding their dream present could be done at your leisure in time for their birthday...

Letting go of your perfectionism just a teeny weeny bit will do wonders for your stress levels.

63. You Don't Have To Be Superhuman

There's a good reason why Santa has a team of Elves to help!

Even if asking for help isn't your usual style, how about making an exception this Christmas?

If you find it difficult to ask for help, here are 3 really important questions:

- What could you ask for help with today?
- Who could you ask for that help?
- Are there any beliefs or fears you need to let go of, to allow you to accept that help?

These three questions can transform your life – not just for Christmas!

Summary

Whatever your challenges around presents, decorating or Christmas cards, hopefully this section has provided you with some inspiration.

Are you ready to move on to the next step...

Christmas Entertaining

Part Five: Christmas Entertaining

Strategies 64 - 73

So your Christmas festivities are here and whether you're the host or a guest, it can be a stressful time.

From how to beat the last-minute supermarket food rush through to how to avoid 'eating yourself miserable', these 9 tips provide inspiration to help you keep your cool about Christmas Entertaining.



64. Shop Ahead

Over 2 decades on and I still have vivid memories of my mother phoning the manager of the local supermarket, trying to beg parsnips on Christmas Eve. Somehow she did actually get them, but she was lucky!

If you're entertaining at Christmas, it's a fine balance between buying ahead and keeping things fresh.

Whatever you do, don't leave it till the last minute or you'll be doing a Christmas lunch of beans on toast...

Make the most of local suppliers and even veg box delivery schemes, who will deliver your pre-booked Christmas vegetables, even after the supermarkets have run out!

65. Plan A Menu That Will Work For Everyone

That way you don't end up cooking 5 different meals, which is a recipe for super-stress.

Of course, there will always be the random vegetarians (me!), those with wheat intolerances and the plain old faddy eaters, but if you can, try to create a menu that allows you to offer the same dish to as many of your guests as possible.

Check out Christmas recipe books for plenty of ideas.

<http://tinyurl.com/christmasrecipeideas>

And if you're a Christmas guest with special food requirements, please do the decent thing and let your host know as soon as you can. With everything else they've got going on, it's not fair to expect them to remember that you don't like blue cheese or that goose fat gives you indigestion.

And you might even want to offer to bring some of your own food, if you think that would help.

Got a really fussy eater coming? You might ask them to suggest some recipes and perhaps even to help with the cooking. It's not as though you're a restaurant!

66. Check ahead for anyone with allergies

A few years ago I threw a dinner party to celebrate a friend's birthday.

I spent the day cooking everything from a veggie lasagne to the most incredible panna cotta.

Everything was going brilliantly until I was serving up the lasagne (blue cheese, spinach and pine nut, with extra cheese on top...) and I suddenly remembered that one of the guest's girlfriends had a cheese allergy.

I can't actually remember how I rescued the situation – I suspect I have deleted it from my memory banks due to the pain of the embarrassment – but it taught me never to assume that guests will be able to eat what I cook. (And that's not just my culinary skills!)

So check ahead for anyone who might have allergies...

"When it comes to Christmas entertaining: assume nothing!"

67. Less Is More

Alcohol and caffeine (tea, coffee, hot chocolate, lots of fizzy drinks) will dehydrate you and make you tired and tense.

They'll also create a blood sugar roller coaster that can leave you feeling exhausted, grumpy and even more stressed.

If you want to avoid that, all you need to do is drink a glass of water between each drink.

68. What Are You Eating?

Christmas is usually a time to indulge and the research on how many calories we can consume over the festive period is frightening.

But it's not only the calories that are the problem.

Most of our Christmas food is laden with sugars or chemicals that our body needs to detox, which takes energy and can impact our mood.

Eating some extra portions of fresh fruit and veg will supply you with antioxidants, to help your body process any extra toxins from those Christmas sweets and sherries.

69. Are You Eating Yourself Miserable?

It's Christmas, so obviously you're going to want to enjoy your food, but if you notice you're getting really sluggish, cutting out the salt, sugar and caffeine for a bit will help. Here are 5 common food traps that might end up wrecking your mood.

Trap 1: Sugar

Reaching for something sweet when we're feeling low is so instinctive; you'd almost think it's hard-wired.

Carbohydrates and refined sugars will give us a short-term boost, but the blood sugar low we get afterwards can lead to mood swings and even tantrums in kids.

What you could do instead?

University researchers have shown that cravings for sweet foods, particularly the late night munchies, are actually cravings for water – we're not very good at reading the signs.

To balance your blood sugar, half a teaspoon of cinnamon powder each day can help.

If the carbs roller coaster is an issue for you, there are two really helpful, practical books you might like to check out. Find out more in the resources section of this book's website:

www.ClareJosa.com/relax

Trap 2: Caffeine

It's in coffee, tea, cola drinks and plenty more besides. Caffeine is a stimulant that can take us into "fight or flight" mode, making us edgy and irritable. So if you're already stressed or angry, it's the last thing you need.

What you could do instead?

To rehydrate your system and give yourself an instant energy boost, a glass of cool water could make a difference. If you're feeling tense and irritable, you might prefer camomile tea. And, of course, there's breathing – take 3 deep breaths, breathing in through your nose. Fill your lungs from your stomach upwards and then breathe out through your mouth with a sigh. It works!

Trap 3: Sweeteners & Additives

We think we're doing the right thing by going for the low-cal, low-fat options, but they have to do something to replace the taste and texture you'd have had from the sugars and fats. Unfortunately this is often in the form of sweeteners and chemical additives.

The various food agencies have approved their use, but there is growing research evidence that they can impact your mood.

One of the leading artificial sweeteners is now official linked with mood swings and even depression, for regular users. And we've known for years that the infamous "e-numbers" can cause behavioural problems in children.

What you could do instead?

Check labels in the supermarket. As a rule of thumb, if there's an ingredient on the list that you wouldn't cook with at home, think twice before putting it into your basket.

Consider buying the non-diet versions, but eating less of them...

Trap 4: Alcohol

How many times do we get to the end of a tough day and think, "I could really do with a glass of wine / a beer?"

And there has been research showing that some alcoholic drinks can have health benefits, in moderation.

But alcohol itself is a toxin to the body. And even in just moderate quantities, it's also a depressant that suppresses brain activity and dehydrates your body. So if you want to feel happier, a stiff drink is probably not the best place to start.

What you could do instead?

Drink a glass of water between each alcoholic drink, to reduce your thirst and help your liver and kidneys process the alcohol. And it might be worth taking an honest look in the mirror, to see whether there are underlying issues you might need to address.

Trap 5: Wheat & dairy

Wheat and dairy products are fine, in moderation. But if you have a food intolerance, you might find that the side effects of bloating and heaviness drag your mood down, too. So if you naturally reach for wheat-based or dairy-based comfort foods, it might be worth noticing how you feel afterwards.

What you could do instead?

Check you're not suffering from low blood sugar (see trap 1 advice). And if you think it might be a boredom thing, how about spending 5 minutes waking up your body with some stretches, a quick dance or a short walk instead?

How do you know if you're stuck in the food traps?

Keep a "food 'n' mood" diary for 2 weeks.

Simply keep a note of EVERYTHING you're eating and drinking (no cheating!) and every few hours, make a note of your mood next to it. After a week you should be able to spot clear trends.

That'll help you figure out what to eat differently, if you want to feel happier.

70. Omega Oils As An Anti-Stress Device!

There's a proven link between Omega oils and brain function.

Most of us are already low on these essential nutrients and party season is a time when we need them most.

Omega 3 is particularly good at balancing our emotions.

So to keep yourself feeling good, you might want to consider supplementing your diet.

Talk to an expert at your local health food shop or a holistic nutritionist for advice.

71. If Everyone Hates Brussels Sprouts, Don't Cook Them!

Just because something is traditionally eaten at Christmas, it doesn't mean you have to cook it.

If your family hates sprouts, don't serve them. It's really not worth the stress of force feeding them to the kids or Grannie, if it's something they don't like.

The same goes for bread sauce, stuffing or any other component of your traditional Christmas lunch.

Alternatively, it could just be that you need some new recipe inspiration.

How about checking out our favourite recipe website for loads of Brussels Sprouts inspiration:

<http://www.vegbox-recipes.co.uk/ingredients/brussel-sprouts.php>

72. Peel & Slice The Night Before

Whether you're cooking for 4 or 40, peel and slice the night before.

Anything that can be done in advance should be done in advance.

Enlist help!

Create a list of timings for the big day.

Then you'll be freeing yourself up to enjoy being the host, rather than feeling like a slave in the kitchen.

And if you're a guest, don't stand on ceremony – offer to help! People rarely ask for it, especially when they need it most.

73. Christmas Is About Creating Memories

Remember: whatever has been going on for you, Christmas is about creating memories of wonderful experiences, whatever the food, not about wonderful food, whatever the experience.

Does that help you keep things in perspective?

Which memories would you like to create this Christmas?

Summary

Do you have even more ideas about how to de-stress Christmas Entertaining?

Could you talk to friends and family, to find out what they found useful?

Hopefully this last section has helped provide some short-n-sweet inspiration for stress-free Christmas entertaining.

Are you ready to start de-stressing The Big Day?

Part Six: The Big Day

Strategies 74 - 101

It's the big day and, whether you're the host or being entertained, there are some great things you can do to make sure the only "bang" in your Christmas festivities comes from the crackers.

These 28 strategies will help you keep your cool, even if family war breaks out in your front room or the roast potatoes turn to cinders.



74. Create A Big “To Do” List

Make sure you know what needs to be done when.

By writing it down, it means you don’t have to remember it all, so you can de-stress a bit.

Plus it makes it easier to see how you could share the load and assign some tasks to others. Get names against jobs – other than yours!

*"A Christmas motto?
Delegate! Delegate! Delegate!"*

75. Be A Peace Maker

If Grandma and Great Uncle Max normally argue, then chances are they'll continue the tradition at Christmas.

Even if everyone is on their best behaviour, there is bound to be some friction or minor tension.

Instead of worrying about it and trying to keep everyone happy, how about assuming the role of peace maker?

It's not about getting stuck in the middle or taking sides. It's about helping everyone to stay calm and happy, so that tensions don't escalate.

If they do, you can always lock yourself in the loo and do #35!

76. Dare To Wear Your Rose-Tinted Glasses

This one can be really good fun.

If you spend the day wearing your rose-tinted glasses – choosing only to see the positive things that are going on – you can shift the mood so that everyone goes with you.

Just imagine that!

It could help you make this one the best Christmas ever.

Another lovely thing to do is to spend fifteen minutes at the end of the day, writing down the happy memories:

- What did you enjoy today?
- What went well?
- Were there any funny stories?

This sets you up for a great night's sleep – and some fantastic Christmas memories!

77. Believe What Others Say They Want

Ask others to be honest about what they want to do – then believe them. It's not your problem if they choose not to be honest with you!

I often hear people saying they feel stressed about making sure everyone has a good time at Christmas.

Yet people don't like to ask for what they really need – or tell others what they really want to do.

And you can't force them to feel happy and enjoy themselves. That's something that has to come from within.

Christmas can end up being a time of compromises, where no one really enjoys themselves and everyone is doing what they think everyone else expects of them.

The easy way out of this is to ask others to be honest about what they want to do – and then believe them.

It might sound harsh, but if they're not telling you the truth, that's their problem, not yours.

78. Do You Really Want A Fairy Tale Christmas?

The television and magazines often portray images of family Christmases where everyone gathers round the tree, singing carols, and the food miraculously appears from the direction of the kitchen, as though prepared by house elves.

But it rarely works out that way.

So my invitation to you this Christmas is to tell yourself:

"Everything is just right, even if it goes wrong. And that's ok."

Just accept what happens. Change what you can. Let go of what you can't.

And smile! (See #46).

79. Whatever Happens, Look For The Silver Lining

No matter what goes on with your Christmas festivities, look for the silver lining.

There always is one.

If you're leading the way doing this, you'll help everyone else enjoy their Christmas more, too.

Focus on what is going well.

*Let whatever went wrong rest in the
past.*

80. Kill Them With Kindness

So it's got to the stage where they're driving you mad and, quite frankly, you'd like to recycle them along with the wrapping paper.

What's the answer, to help you regain your Christmas cool?

*My Nanna used to call it "killing them
with kindness."*

Basically, keep being kind.

Even if you want to yell, keep being kind.

Not fake, pretend kindness, but real, genuine kindness.

It's the fastest way to neutralise a confrontational situation and it will help you feel much happier.

Stuck for inspiration?

How about asking yourself:

*"What would kindness do or say, right
now?"*

You might be surprised by the answer.

81. It's Not A Competition, Or Is It?

It really isn't a competition – I promise you. And no one can force you into a competition.

No matter what your mother-in-law created last year, it's not the Olympics, and there are no medals for creating a "better Christmas" than anyone else's.

People will remember the love with which Christmas was created much more than the actual things that happened.

So how about letting go of the feeling of needing to live up to someone else's standards?

How about just getting on with the job of enjoying the moment?

82. You're Not Responsible For Whether Others Enjoy Themselves

Really!

Everyone else can choose to be miserable – if they want.

Or they can choose to be happy.

We all know someone who will lurk in the corner armchair, looking glum, whether they're surrounded by laughter or tears.

The fact is that, whilst you can be a great host, or guest, it's ultimately up to everyone else whether they choose to make the effort to enjoy themselves.

That's entirely their choice.

So how about letting yourself off the hook?

83. Spread A Little Happiness

The Seven Dwarves used to tell us to “whistle while you work” and they certainly seemed to be happy chappies.

You can set an example to inspire others by simply choosing to feel happy, whatever you’re up to over Christmas.

That’s the quickest way to spread happiness.

You can’t make anyone else happy, but by you feeling happy, you’ll inspire them to life their mood.

And perhaps that’s one of the greatest gifts you could give them?

84. You Can't Change Others...

*You can't change others, but you can
change how you respond.*

Ok, I'm hearing the objections again.

It took me a long, long time to get my head round this one, but it's true – sorry.

There is nothing at all on this planet that you can do to physically change someone else's behaviour.

Yes, you can provide plenty of incentive, but ultimately there is no way you can actually get them to behave in the way you believe they should.

It's up to them.

But if you want to influence them, to encourage them towards behaviour that you feel might work better, the easiest way is to change how you're responding to them.

If they're tense and angry, your automatic response might be to feel tense and angry back. You're keeping the cycle going, like a dance.

But if you choose to respond differently, they'll quickly get the message that the dance has changed and they're then more likely to change their behaviour.

How about trying that one on for size?

85. Focus On What Goes Well

I have to confess that, over 20 years on, I still vividly remember my mum dropping the turkey on Christmas morning.

And it still makes me chuckle (sorry – mum).

But the other thing I also remember about that morning is that she didn't let it ruin the day.

She could have stormed off and cried all day, but she just pulled herself together, had a Sherry and got on with creating a wonderful Christmas.

And no matter what dramas unfold in your Christmas this year, focusing on what goes well, rather than anything that went wrong, is a brilliant way to keep things in perspective and create memories that people will treasure for years.

Chances are that you're the only one who even noticed whatever went wrong, unless you make a huge fuss about it!

86. Take Time Out For Yourself

“Frazzled” is an adjective you often hear from Christmas hosts and guests alike.

If you think you’re on your way there, it’s up to you to delegate things to someone else so you can take some time out.

Even if that’s just hiding in the bathroom and doing some deep breathing for 5 minutes (#50), it’s essential that you keep recharging your batteries.

And it’s a great example to teach those around you.

87. Don't Be A Christmas Martyr!

Ask for help!

You're ready to drop, but you're still peeling potatoes and basting the joint.

Then you serve the meal, clear up and start to wash up, while everyone else is relaxing at the table, too full of Christmas pudding to move a muscle.

Why are you doing it?

Isn't it someone else's turn?

Sure, they might not do it quite the way you would, but it's unlikely to be a disaster.

Being a Christmas martyr doesn't just wear you out, it sets a poor example to others that you're there to do all the work.

Wouldn't you rather swallow your pride and ask for help, so you can enjoy things, too?

Doing everything by yourself doesn't prove to your family that you love them. It just proves to them that you feel you have to do it all yourself.

88. What's The Most Dangerous Word You Can Use At Christmas?

Want to feel tired, stressed, miserable and fed up at Christmas? Then there's one little word you need to use as often as possible:

"should"

"Should" and its close friends "ought to" and "supposed to" are all about feeling obligated to do things that you don't really want to do. They're the kind of things you'd much rather wriggle your way out of, but feel you can't.

"There's no such word as can't".

Great Aunty Yo

We can always choose not to do something, if we don't want to do it...

To me, "should" is even worse than "have to". At least "have to" implies you feel you have zero options. "Should" implies that you aren't quite convinced that you have to, but you're going to anyway, or that you're basing the decision on what you think others expect.

My usual response to should (nowadays), to avoid that sinking feeling of obligation, is to ask myself:

"Who says?"

It's an easy way to challenge assumptions and you might be surprised how often the "should" task can then conveniently disappear.

89. Ask For A Job

Christmas can be a great time to relax, particularly if life is usually pretty stressful for you.

But it can also (hopefully!) make you feel at least a little bit guilty, chilling out in the other room, sipping the Christmas sherry, while your host is slaving away.

If in doubt, ask for a job. Be firm, but don't insist.

If there's something you can do to help, then take the weight off your host's shoulders.

If they politely resist, you could try phrases like:

*"It would mean a lot to me to be able
to do something to help."*

Or

*"I'd love to spend some time with you.
Could I help with...?"*

90. Let Others Get Involved!

Moving on from #89, if you're the host and someone offers to help, let them!

People genuinely want to help – usually! And if they don't and they're only pretending, then that serves them right anyway!

So if offers of help come your way, make the most of them!

There's absolutely no point in allowing yourself to get stressed, if someone else is offering to take on a job for you.

Even if they don't do it as well as you might have (the number one reason why most of us don't like to delegate!), it's not like the Queen is coming to dinner, so does it really matter? Really?

Go on, let them help!

91. Be Compassionately Truthful

What's this one all about?

Well, Christmas parties and festivities are great places for resentment to build up.

People tend to do and say what they think others want to see and hear, rather than speaking up and being honest.

So whether you're a guest or a host, if something about the day isn't working, then I invite you to speak your truth – be honest – but with compassion!

It's not about reducing Auntie Mabel to tears! But it is about being genuine. And you might be surprised at the difference it will make.

92. Others' Expectations Are Just That.

What others expect will happen and how they expect things to be done are just their expectations.

They haven't (usually) been passed as a national law.

They're not rules, they're not even requirements. They're really just the way the other person imagines or assumes things should be.

So if what they are expecting isn't working for you, be honest about it and tell them. There's bound to be a workable compromise.

93. Create Your Own Traditions

I didn't even think about this one until after my son was born and we hosted our first family Christmas.

It suddenly occurred to me that the way our childhood family Christmases had run wasn't going to work for me. We used to open presents in the morning, then my sister and I would play with them while the "grown-ups" slaved in the kitchen. As a young child, the family aspect of Christmas often got lost in the excitement of the presents and my parents ended up unappreciated and exhausted.

So we have created a new tradition of focusing on the meal, then opening presents when we were all ready, in the afternoon.

Whatever you think might work for you, how about trying it out this year?

Don't be afraid to tweak things!

94. Don't Battle On Regardless.

If you're tired, stressed or just plain not enjoying it, change what you're doing and ask for help.

Just because it's Christmas, it doesn't mean you have to battle on regardless. In fact, it's the best reason not to.

Christmas is for you, too! So give yourself the chance to enjoy it.

95. Use Your Camera To Capture Happy Memories

This is a simple Christmas de-stressing technique, though it might sound odd at first!

If you give yourself the task of capturing happy memories on camera, then your attention will focus on spotting the happy events and you'll automatically put on your rose-tinted glasses (see step #76).

If your usual Christmas stress strategy is to worry about people not getting on and things going wrong, then having to focus on people enjoying themselves and things going right will shift your experience.

This “job” forces you to change your perspective and spot the good stuff.

This strategy could make a huge difference for you.

96. Open Presents Slowly

You've put so much effort into choosing and wrapping presents, yet the paper is often off before you could say "Ho, ho, ho!"

Making sure the family takes time to enjoy opening presents and appreciate the gifts can create a wonderful atmosphere at Christmas, reducing stress levels and helping the kids stay calm.

As a wise friend of mine reminded me recently:

*"There are twelve days of Christmas;
not just one."*

Let the magic last!

97. Sort Wrapping And Recycling As You Go

*It wasn't until several days later, after the bin men had been,
that Mum realised her Christmas ear rings weren't in the box...*

We never found them...

30+ years ago – and it still gets mentioned every Christmas!

And it taught us a major lesson about Christmas stress:

Check what you're recycling.

Sort out the wrapping paper and recycling as you go along and assign one person to be responsible for checking that there are no presents lurking in the rubbish!

98. **Avoid Politics & Religion**

If you want a peaceful Christmas, do the obvious and avoid talking about controversial topics.

Every family has its fair share of subjects that cause rows, but politics and religion are always best avoided, too!

And if you spot anyone getting into an argument, how about going over and gently changing the subject?!

Distraction is often the most effective intervention.

Distracting them with a task, can be even more effective:

"Aunty Mae, I'd really value your opinion on where the candles should go on the table. Could you spare a minute?"

- a potentially explosive situation diffused!

99. Don't Over-Hype The Kids

It might seem impossible to achieve this one. I still remember my little sister and I being so excited about Christmas that we would crawl through the obstacles that Father Christmas had set up in front of the door to the room where the presents had been laid out – at 3 in the morning...

Then there was the year that we had twigged we couldn't open our presents until after mum and dad had had breakfast. So we made them boiled eggs and presented them to them, proudly, long before daybreak. The problem was that, with no sense of time, we hadn't cooked the eggs for long enough. Apparently mum hid hers in her bedside table, so we wouldn't find out! Bless!

Over-hyped kids are a recipe for Christmas disaster.

Make sure they are eating something (at least vaguely healthy) at regular intervals and that they're not getting dehydrated or on a blood sugar roller coaster.

Open presents slowly – even over several days - and try to set up calm intervals during the day.

You know what works for your kids on a typical day, so just do plenty of that at Christmas and you should be well on the way to keeping stress levels lowered.

And remember the big kids too! We're just as bad...

Good luck!

100. How Flexible Can You Be?

Christmas is all about being flexible. And compromising.

The Queen's Speech is a classic example. Most of us have a Marmite-style love / hate thing about it. If half the family want to watch it, let them. If the other half don't, then don't force them. Let them do something else in another room.

What are the potential compromises you could pre-empt for this Christmas? And how could you make sure they won't be a problem?

101. Have Fun!

And finally...

This is one that's so easily forgotten!

Christmas is a time to have fun.

To finish off, how about writing down 3 ways you plan to have fun this Christmas? And then doing them!

1.

2.

3.

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 Clare's newsletter:
www.ClareJosa.com/updates
- Join us on Facebook – www.Facebook.com/cjosa
- Chat with us on Twitter – www.Twitter.com/clare_josa
- Check out our YouTube channel –
<http://www.YouTube.com/clarejosa/>
- Remember to make the most of the resources that go with this book – www.clarejosa.com/Christmas/relax

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

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