



It's the most magical time of the year, apparently, but if you let the pressure get you down it may ruin it for you and for others. We show you how to stay calm

# 'Tis the season to be... STRESSED!

**T**he amount of stress we put ourselves under during the festive season can be huge. Too much stress can leave us exhausted, play havoc with our sleep and make us more vulnerable to coughs and colds.

According to a survey by the Samaritans, 62 per cent of respondents felt more worried at Christmas than at any other time of the year, and 43 per cent felt stressed or anxious at Christmas.

So, what can stress us out this time of year?

A new Rescue Remedy survey into Christmas stress shows that buying gifts is the biggest issue, with 65 per cent of people citing it as their main Yuletide worry. Other sources of tension include cooking, hosting the family and money.

We take a look at how you can de-stress these situations.

## Gift shopping

You'd think buying gifts would be a pleasure, as so many of us love to shop. Wrong! It can be a financial and emotional stressfest.

'The world we live in is very commercially driven,' says Neil Shah, Chief De-stressing Officer at The Stress Management Society (stress.org.uk). 'We can feel under a lot of pressure to get gift buying "just right", so this year how about asking people what they would appreciate for a magical Christmas? This helps people think more creatively. Or ask them to make a wish list. Then you could club together with the whole family to get one memorable present.'

Neil adds: 'Also get the children involved, making things that don't cost a fortune but will be hugely appreciated for the effort.'

## Cooking

Christmas dinner is most people's favourite meal of the year – so it's not surprising that we can get worn out aiming for perfection.

'Don't get stressed doing too much on your own,' suggests Neil. 'Get the whole family to share the

responsibility and don't be afraid to delegate. It may take longer, but the meal will be more special as everyone will feel they've contributed. And don't panic if things don't go totally to plan – just enjoy the experience.'

## Playing host

It's a false assumption that just because it's Christmas everything will be wonderful and everyone will get on. The truth is, having family around can be stressful. So here Melanie Phillips, a life coach and cognitive hypnotherapist (lothiantherapy.com), reveals her tips for a happier Christmas.

First, make a light-hearted announcement soon after everyone arrives that there will be no discussions about politics or religion as these conversations inevitably cause arguments and today is for having a fun time.

Second, if people are annoying you, try changing the way you are with them to get a positive result. For example, if you've got a family member who doesn't help out, instead of getting cross and stressed, give them a defined role – such as telling them they'll be great at organising family games.

Third, make sure you get some 'breathers' into the day to help prevent or relieve any tension. Suggest going for a short walk – the fresh air and exercise will help pick up everyone's spirits. It's also good to have regular breaks from food and drink, as excesses can make people irritable. Try serving alcohol only with meals and bring out the chocolates at set times during the day.

If you feel stress coming on, practise some seven/11 breathing to calm you – breathe in for the count of seven through your nose and out for the count of 11 through your mouth. Do this five or six times whenever you need to.

## Paying for it all

Research from National Debtline shows that one in four of us feels pressured to spend more than

we'd planned, with a third of us borrowing money to buy presents.

But you don't need to spend a fortune to have a happy Christmas and there are loads of ways to make your money go further.

For example, when you're out Christmas shopping, head to stores with a price-match policy. When you find something you want, use your smartphone to see if it's cheaper at another outlet. If it is, show customer services the item on your screen, so you can buy it at the cheaper price.

You could also try making your own cards and crackers, and buy gifts in the sales for people you're

not seeing until after Christmas.

For more tips go to [kisbridgingloans.co.uk/consumer-guides](http://kisbridgingloans.co.uk/consumer-guides).

● If it all gets too much, seek help. Lynsey Pollard of the Samaritans says: 'What starts off as stress can develop into finding life difficult to manage. We'd like to urge people to look for help – such as talking to others if they feel stressed or lonely. Our new campaign this year is telling people that it's okay to say you feel rubbish at Christmas!'

You can call the Samaritans free on 116123 at any time, on any day of the year.

## HELPFUL STRESS BUSTERS



● Bach's new Rescue Plus effervescent tablets, £10.85 for 15, contain flower essences, vitamins B12 and B5, zinc and magnesium to help reduce fatigue.

● Vitano rhodiola tablets, £13.99 for 30, are a herbal remedy used to reduce stress, fatigue and anxiety.

● Acupuncture may promote relaxation and reduce anxiety. Actress Sandra Bullock is such a fan, she has it written into her contracts

that there must be a licensed acupuncturist on set. To find a

qualified traditional acupuncturist visit [acupuncture.org.uk](http://acupuncture.org.uk).

● Try a stress-relieving app, such as the free-to-download Remente, for mental well-being, or the meditation app Buddhify, £3.99, both on iOS and Android.

● Boost your magnesium levels to help promote calmness. Try taking a bath or foot bath with BetterYou Magnesium Flakes, from £3.49 for 150g at [betteryou.com](http://betteryou.com). The magnesium will soak in through your skin to work quickly.



'It's okay to say you feel rubbish at Christmas'