

Keep It Together

Ten ways to keep your cool, your calm and your waistline this holiday season

BY LAUREN FREIMAN, L.Ac.

1 Don't Show Up Hungry
Play it smart at holiday parties; just because your favorite caterer is hosting a party doesn't mean you should starve yourself in preparation. Rather, have a small snack with protein before you show up. You're less likely to overeat or make poor food choices.

2 Move with the Groove
Due to visitors, travel or various schedules, your regular yoga or pilates class may be out of the question. Use this as an opportunity to get creative with your workouts. Studies have shown that even just a few short bursts of ten-minute exercises aid in weight control and help lower blood pressure. Get your feel-good release of endorphins in any way you can. Take a few short brisk walks or make your workout a family affair.

3 Catch Some ZZZs
Snoozing for seven to eight hours a night is one of the most important things you can do for your health. Skimping on sleep will not only make you feel moody and irritable, it can also contribute to weight gain. Restful sleep helps keep the "stress hormone" cortisol in check. High cortisol levels are associated with decreased ability to cope with stress, an increase in appetite and weight gain.

4 Give Yourself a Time-Out
There may be endless to-do lists—but remember to take care of number one. When you feel pampered, you will be more present for the ones you love. Try to maintain at least some of your me-time, whether it is getting a manicure or massage, reading a good book or taking a candlelit bubble bath.



5 H2O is Your Best Friend

Drinking water or hot tea helps fill you up and keeps your appetite under control. Be sure to drink one glass of water for every glass of alcohol—it will keep you hydrated and help minimize alcohol consumption. Remember that calories you drink and calories you eat are calories just the same!

6 Take a Deep Breath

You may not be able to get in the lotus position in the middle of doing your holiday shopping, but you can stop and take a deep breath anywhere. Do you notice when you're getting stressed or overwhelmed? Stress causes the body to shift into "fight or flight," which results in shallow breathing, tense muscles and increased blood pressure.

Reverse this by taking a few Yogic Retention Breaths. Place your hand on your diaphragm, inhale and push your belly out as you breathe in. At the top of the inhale, wait one second and pause. Then exhale. As you exhale, feel your hand moving in toward your spine. At the bottom of the exhale, wait one second, pause and exhale. Repeat, increasing the length between the inhale and exhale. You will feel calm, collected and ready to meet any challenge in no time.

7 Go Ahead, Be Sinful

Life is short. Enjoy dessert. Survey the landscape, choose one sweet or guilty pleasure and relish it. Don't pick something you can eat anytime, pick something special. If you deprive yourself, you're more likely to overindulge later.

If you find yourself stuck in a cycle of constant sugar cravings, have your dessert with a little protein. Try a handful of almonds, a spoonful of peanut butter or fresh whipped cream. Protein helps keep your blood sugar levels in balance so you can indulge without your sweet tooth getting the best of you.

8 Laugh

There is a proverb: "If you are too busy to laugh, you are too busy." The holiday season can be one of the busiest and most stressful times of the year. If you're feeling crazed, lean on your sense of humor. Try taking it all a little less seriously. Let yourself laugh about the cookie disaster in the kitchen, or the parking frenzy at the shopping center. It's hard to stay frustrated, sad or stressed after a good laugh. Laughing eases tension, promotes relaxation and even burns calories—fifty calories for every ten to fifteen minutes. Watch a funny movie or TV show. Hang out with a funny friend (yes, we all have one). Just laugh.

9 Get Acupuncture

If you really need to give your stress a kick in the butt, try acupuncture. Acupuncture stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which controls rest and relaxation. In addition to stress, it's effective for anxiety, depression, pain relief, insomnia, chronic conditions and almost every sign or symptom that may be ailing you.

10 Be Grateful

Being grateful reminds us of what's important in life. It can turn seemingly bad things into good things. Stuck in a crowded airport? Be grateful for time with your family. Overwhelmed with demanding houseguests? Be grateful for the opportunity to share the holidays together. Turn your mind toward thoughts about why you're grateful—it will bring you joy, peace and gifts even Santa couldn't find. ■



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