



**Christmas Survival Guide
(aka stress-free Christmas holiday)
in 5 simple steps
(plus a bonus at the end 😊)**

Christmas is a joyous occasion for many. But what if you don't feel that way? What if meeting your (extended) family is driving you nuts?

Step 1. Plan

Planning is key to your success, i.e. how much stress you will be experiencing over the holidays. If you already know that being with your family for prolonged periods of time overwhelms you, causes anxiety and worry, then plan a shorter trip. Consider renting somewhere away from the main hassle of the gathering. This would give you an excuse to leave early or not to show up too soon in the morning.

Give yourself time to rest afterwards too.

Be prepared to ditch your plan if something unexpected happens and it requires your immediate attention. Allow flexibility helps you stay happy.

Plan the time you will be leaving festivities for the day or days. Have that in your mind in advance. And stick to it, as much as you can. Learn beforehand what time is way past your bedtime – and it's different for all people.

If you are getting overwhelmed by planning, try breathing technique in Step 3 and come back to it.

Step 2. Carve time for yourself

Sometimes even the good things can turn to be too much. So even if you in general enjoy being surrounded by a lot of people, there are limits that all of us have. Plan to have some quieter time for yourself.

- What helps you recharge your batteries?
- What energises you?
- Could you find a way to do that while in the Christmas gathering?

Some ideas to ponder on:

- Perhaps volunteering to get some milk from the shop for teas?
- Or volunteering to walk a dog?
- Or going for a short walk on your own. You could even link this to your health goals for 2023 and start early. Can you imagine how much better you would feel come 1 January if you already started during Christmas?

Step 3. Breathe

Holidays can bring a fare amount of agitation, frustration, even anger. If you cannot let it go before the holidays, then notice your breath and use it as your guide. If your



breath gets short and you can barely feel it, that's a definite sign your body is being strained. You may even begin to notice tensions (often people feel this in their shoulders, back, belly or chest). Take a deep breath – this will give you time to pause before you say something you may regret.

One of the most useful techniques in calming yourself down is by extending your exhalations. So take a moment to notice how long is your inhalation and how long is your exhalation (you can count in your head). If you already notice that your exhale is shorter, try to extend it. Get to the place where it's even and try to extend it further without force, gently, gradually. Say, you inhale for the count of 3 and exhale for 3, try to get the ratio to 3 inhale to 4 exhale. If that is working well, try the count of 3 inhale to 5 exhale. Spend 3-5min on this and let your breath return to the natural pace.

If you get often stressed and overwhelmed by people, it could be time to look at what's behind it all. Yoga therapy provides a safe space to explore what your body is telling you.

Step 4. Eat in moderation

That's a real tough one, for sure. I am guilty of overeating during the holidays big time. But there are a couple of techniques I learnt over the years and I am getting very close to moderation.

- Cook less – it may look like you need a LOT more food, but you very likely don't. (If this is out of your control, there are more techniques to come). We eat with our eyes a lot and often don't perceive how much food we can actually consume without feeling like we are about to burst.
- If you are drinking, alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic. Better with 1 alcoholic with 2 non-alcoholic, but even 1 to 1 ratio would help you stay on track with the rest of techniques. You could, of course, skip alcohol altogether.
- Ditch the big dinner plates and use the smaller plates instead. If you are also worried about your weight, this is a great trick. Your mind really only considers the quantity by plate count. So whether you have eaten 2 plates of food that covered the entire dinner plate or a much smaller plate, your mind thinks you had the same amount, i.e. 2 plates. So ditch the big plates! And if something doesn't fit onto your plate, well, maybe you don't need to it.
- Take breaks between the small amounts eaten (I don't think I can call this as "meals", as you are likely to be sitting for one meal and just carrying on eating). This allows your body to register how full you are and hopefully, when you are reaching the point that you are full, you will be able to get the signals back to your brain to stop eating.
- Listen to those signals! Listen to your body.
- When your body is telling you it's quite full, step away from the table. I do mean it literally. If you continue sitting, you will keep seeing the food and



you will keep eating. So removing the temptation will help. As they say, out of sight, out of mind.

- If you can, you could even move away food, so it takes quite an effort to get to it. Perhaps you place the food in the kitchen on high shelves, move it to a different room (or you move to a different room). Simply staying away from it. The other room should be food free – no snacks. You just had a meal; you are definitely NOT hungry.
- If you think you are hungry, your mind is lying to you, so listen to your body instead.
- To have even more success next year, set a reminder in your phone closer to next year's Christmas of what worked and what didn't:
 - If you were cooking, was there too much food?
 - Was there food you didn't like? Ditch it next year.
 - Did you have to throw away food? You definitely cooked too much, reduce next time.
 - Which techniques were most helpful?
 - Which didn't quite work for you? Is there a way to make them better that they would work for you?
 - Is there something you would like to use for other food filled holidays? Or even every day?

This covers the techniques I practice myself every year. Be kind to yourself – don't expect to get them perfect first time. I am still improving mine. But I got way better over the years after making 36 dishes (think of Spanish tapas small plates, not like a roast with potatoes and vegetables as one dish) for two people one year about 10 years ago...

Step 5. Get enough sleep

This one can be very hard to follow. You may want to stay with everyone and chat longer. Or you may really want to get away from everyone, but feeling obliged like you have to stay and talk to everyone. Learn to exit on a high. What do I mean by that? Leave just after you having fun has reduced a teeny bit. If your gathering is very big, you might just slip away unnoticed. But if not, say your goodbyes with the nearest person or two and head to bed or just for some carved time for yourself first, if you need a little bit of unwinding to do.

If your mind is feeling too energised and it's hard to sleep, you could try:

- Sitting and observing breath even for just a few minutes could calm your mind, if the breathing is slow.
- If it's not, you can slow it down. Breath is one thing that we can control.
- Meditation is another great tool to have and in a sense if you are spending time observing your breath you are meditating already, so just carry on.



I did say the steps are simple, that may not mean they are very easy. But if followed, they help you stay calm as a cucumber.

And now onto the bonus...

You don't have to do anything at all.

Let me repeat this:

You don't need to do anything you don't want.

Let that really sink in.

If you don't like big gatherings – you don't need to go to them. You don't own anyone anything (other than to yourself).

Create your own Christmas traditions that work for you.

You only have one life. Make it count!

Have a stress-free holiday!

Namaste!

Aiste

P.S. You will find me during Christmas holiday curled up with a book, going for a walk, doing yoga, and eating, probably still a teeny bit too much 😊 Those are my Christmas traditions. I might even throw in a Harry Potter movie marathon into my own – a Christmas tradition of a dear friend.