

HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE



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Holiday Survival Guide



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Holiday Survival Guide



The topics and tips in this Holiday Survival Guide are based on the input of people from all over the USA and Canada who took time to answer my question online: "What is your greatest challenge during the holidays?"

This Guide is dedicated to them. I also hope it helps you find more joy during the holidays.

Pauline Wallin, Ph.D.

November 27, 2006

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Introduction

A recent Google search for "holiday stress" yielded over 2.3 million hits! That's 2.3 million websites and articles devoted to managing all the tasks and obligations that come with the holiday season.

It didn't always used to be this way. 100 years ago people didn't need advice for how to cope with the holidays. They followed the traditions of their parents and grandparents, with little thought of improvising or changing things around.

But in the past few years, the holidays have taken on a "performance" dimension, where the goal is - according to the ads and commercials - to impress, and even more, to amaze your friends.

Instead of focusing on the fun and enjoyment of the holidays, we make them another form of competition - who will look the best; who will make the best pie, who will buy the best present; who will have the most original food and decorations; and who will spend the most money.

Everyone seems to complain that the holidays have become too commercialized . . .so where do all those people come from, who are lined up at the malls at 5:00 a.m. on the Friday after Thanksgiving?!

For many people, the commercial aspect of the holidays is the least of their worries. They are concerned about family matters - conflicts and avoiding them, divided loyalties, obligations and expectations.

Holidays put a strain on finances. People voluntarily spend more money than they might be able to afford, and then have to deal with the fall-out over the next several months.

Food is another big issue at the holidays. There is more of it and we are less apt to exercise self-control. The average weight gain during November and December is 4-7 lb.

And while all the world seems to be celebrating, some of us are grieving over the illness or loss of a family member or friend. Others are dealing with divorce, job loss and other difficult life circumstances.

This Holiday Survival Guide addresses issues that people often encounter during November and December. It is for informational purposes only. It is not intended as a substitute for personal consultation with a professional, or as any type of psychological service.

If you are experiencing serious anxiety or depression, or if you have major problems just getting through each day, then you are advised to consult a mental health professional. To locate a psychologist near you, call the American Psychological Association: 1-800-964-2000





Family

“Families are about love overcoming emotional torture.”

-- Matt Groening, creator of The Simpsons

Family Structure, Traditions and Obstacles

The problem: Families come in all shapes and sizes these days. The meaning of family is no longer limited to biological lineage. Of course, the most common family consists of grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles and cousins; but it also can refer to any group of people who regard themselves as a family.

What all families have in common is a sense of loyalty. Loyal family members watch over one another and take care of one another when necessary. For this you receive the perks of belonging and security.

But loyalty is also a source of problems, especially around the holidays. Family ties are more complex than 50 years ago:

- ❁ People live longer, and there are more generations still around. It's not unusual to have four generations of people trying to coordinate visits.
- ❁ The high frequency of divorce and remarriage blends families together, which can result in conflicting loyalties.
- ❁ Jobs and military service often require family members to live apart for months at a time.
- ❁ The increasing rate of intermarriage between people of different religions can cause a conflict of traditions.

Thus, where you spend the holiday and which traditions you follow, is no longer a simple matter. And trying to be fair to all family members often backfires, with at least one family member (maybe you) feeling insulted or rejected.

Tips for who visits whom, and when:

Accept the fact that everyone may NOT be able to get together to celebrate the holiday. Keep in mind that this is not a test of loyalty. It's a matter of logistics.

- ❁ If you are hosting the family dinner, don't take it personally when relatives choose to go elsewhere.
- ❁ If you have several family members to visit, decide what is realistic in terms of your schedule. You may decide to stagger visits either from year to year, or on days before and after the actual holiday.
- ❁ Some relatives may grumble about your choices and decisions. Realize that you cannot please everyone.
- ❁ If you and your spouse/significant other cannot come to a mutual agreement about family visits, it's OK for each of you to spend some time alone with your own families.
- ❁ Don't fall into the trap of accommodating family members who threaten, "If he shows up, I'm leaving," or "If you invite her, I'm not coming." If you get such comments, reply, "Sorry you won't be there. We'll miss you."

Tips for observing and blending traditions:

- ❁ Sharing a life with someone means you share not only experiences, but also your individual histories and traditions. When it comes to observing the holidays, discuss which traditions are most important to each of you, and negotiate a plan for observing them.
- ❁ For example, let's say you grew up with the tradition of opening gifts on Christmas morning, while your spouse opened gifts on Christmas Eve after a special traditional dinner. You might work out a compromise by having the special dinner Christmas Eve and the opening of gifts the next morning.
- ❁ Or suppose you come from different religious backgrounds. If your spouse's family always had a Christmas tree, but your Jewish family celebrated Hanukkah in a modest manner without decorations, you and your spouse will need to decide who values his/her tradition most, and you will agree to a plan.



If you still balk at observing your spouse's traditions, consider doing so as a gift to your spouse.

Tips for dealing with ex-spouses and their families

When it comes to spending holidays with divorced parents, children are often stuck in the middle. Try to view the situation not as your "right" to see your children, but as their right to have a holiday free of conflict.

- ✿ Structure a visitation schedule that is convenient for your children.
- ✿ Don't try to compete with your ex-spouse for the children's attention at this time of year. Parenting is not a contest.
- ✿ No matter how you feel about your children's other parent, refrain from making sarcastic comments or gestures.
- ✿ Make an effort to say something positive about the other parent to your children - even if it's only something like, "Your mom will be proud that you brought Grandpa a pillow without even being asked."

Family conflicts and squabbles

The problem: No matter how old you are, or how professional and sophisticated you may appear to others, when you go home you often regress into a petulant or oppositional child. You may never behave this way except when you are with family.



This is because situational cues (i.e., the presence of the people you grew up with) evoke certain feelings and reactions from you, left over from your childhood. Now, when you walk through the door to your family's home, these same reactions are triggered again.

I call these triggered reactions your *inner brat*.


Everyone has an inner brat, left over from early childhood. It's the part of us that feels entitled to have what we want when we want it. It also has very little tolerance for frustration, and when things go wrong it blames the situation or other people - just as you did when you were a young child.

Old sibling rivalries, unresolved feelings of anger or resentment toward parents, and buried insecurities are all closer to the surface when you're back in the family home, triggered by situational cues. Thus, you're not

only reacting to family members in the present, but you're also reacting to past tensions. And your inner brat makes things worse.

You'll know that your inner brat has taken over when you start getting angry at the slightest provocation, or when you complain about things not being fair. You'll also recognize its presence when you eat, drink or smoke more than you know is good for you.

Tips for managing family conflicts during the holidays

- ❁ Adjust your expectations: Do you grumble to yourself about visiting family weeks before the get-together? This kind of "rehearsing" almost guarantees that you'll have a miserable time. Instead, remind yourself that you are voluntarily attending this event. It may not be perfect but at least it's time-limited. You can do just about anything for a few hours, can't you?
- ❁ Prior to visiting your family, practice some simple relaxation skills such as slow, deep breathing or pleasant visualization. If you find yourself getting tense at the event, take a short time-out to relax and get yourself centered again.
- ❁ Don't allow yourself to be caught between family members who don't talk to each other, or who relay messages through you. If one relative threatens not to come if you invite the other, your best reply is, "Sorry, we'll miss you."
- ❁ When family members act idiotic, mean or critical toward you, remind yourself that such behavior reveals more about them than about you. The very behavior that irks you is probably coming from their inner brats.
- ❁ Resolve to be kind and tolerant, regardless of how other people act. Not only will you be less stressed and have no reason to regret your behavior; but you will also feel in control.
- ❁ Mentally detach yourself from conflict. Imagine that this is a movie of your family and that you are watching it on a big screen. This will help you stay out of the conflict. 
- ❁ Find some humor in the situation. Imagine the stories you'll be able to pass on to future generations.
- ❁ Not getting along with your spouse or significant other? No need to put on an artificial display of affection. But it is important to be civil, especially in front of the children. Don't let your anger ruin their holiday.

- ❁ IF ALL ELSE FAILS: if the experience of visiting your family is so stressful that even the above techniques don't help, give yourself permission to stay away.



Self-help exercise

In the space below, write 3 things that you will do differently this holiday season with regard to your family.

Don't just think about it - write it down. Writing strengthens your commitment and accountability. (If you're reading this on a computer screen, you can use piece of paper.) Carry the page with you, so that you can refer to it often.

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Money, Gifts and Shopping

*“The greatest gift is a portion of thyself.”
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The Problem: Even if you like to shop, buying gifts is a challenge, especially at this time of year. Here's what people have mentioned as their greatest shopping problems:

- ❁ Crowds at the malls
- ❁ Rude customers
- ❁ Rude or indifferent sales clerks
- ❁ Feeling obligated to buy gifts
- ❁ Finding appropriate gifts
- ❁ Budget constraints
- ❁ Ungrateful recipients of gifts

Tips for shopping and spending during the holidays

With all the emphasis on gifts at this time of year, you'd think that people would remember and appreciate what they received.

Do you remember every present you got over the past year? I bet you can't. And children remember even less.

Material gifts are not as important as we think. In my 30+ years as a therapist not one person has ever said that they still resented their parents for not buying them the latest hot toy for Christmas.



Does this mean you should forego gifts altogether? Of course not. But keep a realistic perspective on gift-giving:

- ❁ The amount of money you spend is not as important as the value of the gift to the recipient. A \$10 gadget may be more useful than a \$100 vase.
- ❁ Ask yourself: Are you out to impress people with your gifts - or do you want to add some pleasure to their lives? That pleasure need not be expensive.
- ❁ If you are buying for children, don't feel compelled to spend the same amount for each child. The more you try to treat each child

"equally," the more focused they are on comparing, and the less on appreciating.

- 🌸 Stay within a budget.
- 🌸 A gift is something that you give willingly. No one is "entitled" to it. If you can't afford it, or if you don't want to give to certain people, then don't. No explanation is necessary.

Make your shopping more efficient and enjoyable

- 🌸 Be like Santa - Make a list and check it twice. Then stick to it.
- 🌸 Shop when stores are less crowded. Call the mall manager or store manager to find out when this is
- 🌸 Have patience when shopping. Expect heavy traffic, jammed parking lots, long checkout lines, rude shoppers and overworked sales clerks. Don't let your inner brat turn a simple shopping trip into an ordeal. Allow an extra hour over what you would normally expect to take, and your shopping trip will feel less rushed and more enjoyable.
- 🌸 Do some or all of your shopping online. It's safer than ever. See this website for safe shopping tips: www.safeshopping.org/
- 🌸 Buy gift certificates - not only for store purchases, but also for services, such as hairstyling, massage, home improvement, self-improvement, etc. I offer gift certificates for personal coaching. See details at drwallin.com/giftcertificates.html
- 🌸 Don't be a "maximizer" - i.e., one who must research endlessly to find the absolute best product and the absolute best deal. Studies show that the more time and effort you spend before you buy, the less satisfied you are with your purchase. Instead, decide that as long as something is within an acceptable range, you'll buy it. Then stop looking and comparing, and move on to the next thing.
- 🌸 Procrastination is NOT your friend. The longer you wait to shop, the longer you have to think about it. Imagine how good it will feel to have your shopping finished.



Why it's NOT a good idea to buy kids everything they want:

- 🌸 Kids who get everything they want develop expectations that this will always be the case. This leaves them ill prepared to deal with the world later, as adults.

- ❁ Kids who get everything they want develop a sense of entitlement, with the assumption that things should come easily and on demand. Not only is this unrealistic, but such a sense of entitlement fosters a very self-centered view of life, which can lead to relationship problems as adults.
- ❁ Kids who feel entitled do not develop a sense of appreciation. Research shows that a sense of appreciation is basic to happiness.
- ❁ Research shows that kids who don't learn to postpone gratification may not develop the "emotional intelligence" that is important for long-term success in life. Emotional intelligence includes skills such as self-control, confidence, empathy and communication.



Self-help exercise

In the space below, write 3 things that you will do differently this holiday season with regard to money and gifts.

Don't just think about it - write it down. Writing strengthens your commitment and accountability. (If you're reading this on a computer screen, you can use piece of paper.) Carry the page with you, so that you can refer to it often.

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Food and drink

"I am not a glutton - I am an explorer of food"
-- Erma Bombeck

More than gifts, food is the center of most holidays. At this time of year the main theme is abundance - cocktail buffets, 7-course meals, and rich desserts - and that's not just for one day - it's for several weeks.

This is the time of year when we give ourselves permission to eat, drink and be merry, without regard for calories, fat grams or carb-counting. No wonder that the average American gains 4-7 lbs between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day!

The problem: Food is everywhere, both real and virtual. When we're not bombarded with treats from coworkers, neighbors and local businesses, we see ads and commercials for the most luscious tidbits imaginable.

- ❁ It's easy to rationalize overeating. You give yourself permission to indulge because "it's the holidays." Besides, you promise yourself, you'll cut back in January.
- ❁ The holiday season is a good excuse to buy snacks and treats "for company." You have been known to dip into this stash before company arrives and after they leave.
- ❁ During the holiday season, when you're already stressed and tired, it's harder to exercise self-control over your eating. Your inner brat is relentless in getting you to indulge, to get immediate gratification.
- ❁ Once you begin overeating, it's difficult to stop. Research shows that if you believe you've already "blown your diet" you use that as permission to "blow" it some more, and to keep eating beyond what would normally satisfy you.
- ❁ Cues for eating are all around you: Catalogs arrive daily from companies selling gift baskets of chocolate, nuts, fancy meats and cheeses. Magazines at the checkout line in the supermarket have covers depicting glistening treats.
- ❁ People give you gifts of homemade cookies and other goodies.
- ❁ You like to cook traditional family recipes; you like to eat them even more.

Tips for controlling your exposure to temptation

"Just say no" was the mantra during the "war on drugs" of the 1980s and 1990s. While it was a popular catch-phrase, it didn't do much to reduce illegal drug use.

"Just say no" didn't work for drugs, and it doesn't work for controlling your food intake during the holidays. Here's why:

Self-control is mentally draining. When you repeatedly say "no" to treats, you gradually deplete your mental energy. That's why most people fall off their diets later in the day, when their strength to resist is at a low point.

A better solution: **not confronting the yes/no question in the first place.** The secret is to limit your exposure to temptation. Here are some tips:

- ✿ Store treats in the back of a cupboard or fridge. Wrap them in opaque paper or plastic, so that you don't easily notice them.
- ✿ If there are goodies out on counters or desks at work, reroute yourself so that you don't walk by.
- ✿ Avoid reading recipes for calorie-laden foods. They only encourage you to imagine cooking and eating them.
- ✿ When you see photos of cakes and other desserts in magazines, turn the page quickly. Less exposure is less temptation. Or keep in mind that these photos are composed by food stylists who are paid big bucks to make the food look as tempting as possible. Did you know that the "steam" in a photo of cup of hot chocolate is really dry ice? Or that the milk in the frosted glass is actually Elmer's Glue? Or that the scoop of ice cream next to the apple pie is really a ball of Crisco?
- ✿ If you go to business-related holiday cocktail parties, resolve to visit the buffet table only once. If possible, stay no more than half an hour.
- ✿ Avoid temptation of the leftovers after a meal. Recruit your spouse or kids to put food away and wash the dishes.

Tips for managing cravings

"Just say no" to cravings is actually a little easier than saying no to food that's right in front of you.

Your main challenge is confronting your inner brat (the part of yourself that wants what it wants when it wants it, without regard for the consequences.)

Your inner brat nags you inside your head. It whines that you really do "need" something sweet or salty or greasy. If you resist, it rationalizes that a couple of cookies don't add up to much, and that you can run an extra mile to make up for it.

Here are some tips for keeping your inner brat out of your decisions about food:

- ❁ The time to decide when and what to eat must be made in advance, with as much resolve as you would a promise to a friend. In this case, the friend is yourself.
- ❁ One of the most important things to remember is that the promise to yourself is non-negotiable. There's no bargaining at the buffet table for an extra piece of pie. You made a promise, and you'll respect yourself in the morning for keeping your promise.
- ❁ If the cravings become strong, if your inner brat is screaming at you inside your head, find something to do for just 15 minutes. In most cases, the cravings will have subsided by then.
- ❁ Don't spend time thinking about what you can't eat. In fact, spend as little time as possible thinking about food altogether. Even though your inner brat may not agree, there's more to life than chocolate. Focus on the people at parties and other gatherings, instead of on the food.
- ❁ Get more sleep. Not only will you get the usual benefits of being more alert and less irritable, but research shows that people who sleep more have a better balance of the hormones that regulate hunger - and they weigh LESS than those who don't get enough sleep!
- ❁ Spend some time outside every day. Nature helps clear your head, so that your cravings are less noticeable.

Tips for enjoying holiday food

Just because you're watching your weight, doesn't mean you should forego all holiday treats. In fact, totally depriving yourself puts you at risk for going overboard later on. You'll stay in control, experience no guilt, and really enjoy what you eat by doing the following:

- ❁ Make choices about what to eat. Only select items that you will truly enjoy. Don't waste calories on something that is not worth it.
- ❁ Take small portions and savor them. Take your time to chew and really taste what you're eating. The first bite always tastes the best. The next bite is still good, but after a couple more bites, it's just calories.

- ❁ Don't diminish your savoring experience by watching tv, reading or anything else while eating. Eat to enjoy.
- ❁ Rather than eating alone, share a treat with a friend. You will double your pleasure.



Self-help exercise

In the space below, write 3 things that you will do differently this holiday season with regard to food and eating.

Don't just think about it - write it down. Writing strengthens your commitment and accountability. (If you're reading this on a computer screen, you can use piece of paper.) Carry the page with you, so that you can refer to it often.

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Visitors, Friends and Parties



"My dad used to say that the holidays are when you get a whole bunch of people that really aren't that close and don't know each other that well and overcrowd them into a small room for an extended period of time so they can make each other miserable."

-- Dr. Phil McGraw

The problem: There are just five weekends between Thanksgiving and Christmas. These are "prime time" for visits and parties. In between, there is cooking, decorating, shopping, wrapping, and sending out cards . . . as well as paying bills, schlepping kids and your normal everyday duties.

- ❁ If you have a lot of people to connect with, you're in a time crunch. Certain people may be disappointed or insulted when you don't visit them. Similarly, you may feel hurt if others don't make time for you.
- ❁ Visiting isn't always enjoyable, especially for introverts. If you're not a naturally outgoing person, entertaining others and attending social gatherings will drain your energy. To add to the problem, you may even start grumbling about social gatherings weeks in advance, planning your escape. This only prolongs and intensifies your discomfort.
- ❁ If you're an extrovert, you have a different set of potential problems. After a couple of drinks you might get loud or say something inappropriate. At an office party, this could be a career killer.
- ❁ House guests can be fun during the holidays, but even people that you like can start to get on your nerves after a couple of days.

Tips for managing social visits and obligations

Socializing during the holidays can be viewed as a chore, or as an opportunity. Depending on your attitude you will either dread or enjoy getting together with friends and associates. Here are some tips:

- ❁ Carve out time to spend with the people who matter most to you, and don't let anything stand in the way.
- ❁ If you have houseguests, discuss your tentative schedule during their visit. Do this either before they visit, or shortly after they arrive. Include expectations regarding meals and chores. If you expect company to help themselves to breakfast and to clean up after

themselves, say so. That way, there's less chance of misunderstandings.

- ❁ Some visits are obligatory, such as trips to in-laws who don't like you. If your spouse asks you to come along on the visit, then go. And have a can-do attitude about it. View it as a gift to your spouse.
- ❁ Other obligatory visits include business associates who contribute to your bottom line, and who insist that you join their festivities. Try to schedule these visits at non-prime time, e.g., lunch or weekday evenings, and keep the visits short.
- ❁ There may not be time to squeeze all your social visits into a few busy weeks. At the very least, keep in touch with important friends and family by phone by email, or in a personal message in a holiday card, and arrange a date for getting together after the holidays. The visit will be no less enjoyable in January.
- ❁ Control yourself at office parties. You may be off the clock, but for all intents and purposes, you're still on the job. Dress modestly. Limit alcohol. Avoid telling jokes or using language that might haunt you 6 months from now, and might even cost you a raise or promotion.
- ❁ If socializing is a strain for you, make sure that you build in alone time to unwind in between visits and parties. Otherwise you'll build up resentment that can ruin your holiday season.

Self-help exercise

In the space below, write 3 things that you will do differently this holiday season with regard to socializing with friends and business associates.

Don't just think about it - write it down. Writing strengthens your commitment and accountability. (If you're reading this on a computer screen, you can use piece of paper.) Carry the page with you, so that you can refer to it often.

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If circumstances make the holidays sad or lonely...

*"There is no pain so great as the memory of joy in present grief."
-- Aeschylus*

If you are going through difficult life circumstances such as divorce, unemployment, illness, or death of a loved one, other people's happiness at this time of year may intensify your pain. The happier and more carefree they seem, the worse you feel.

Here are some tips to help you cope:

- ❁ As bad as you may feel now, realize that many others are going through the same thing. Even during times of intense grief, there are spaces of distraction and relief. In most cases, the pain subsides with time.
- ❁ To ease some of your pain, every day write down three things that you are grateful for. Research has shown that this seemingly simple exercise has powerful and lasting benefits.
- ❁ Try not to isolate yourself. Accept invitations, but keep the visits to an hour or less. Make an effort to talk to someone, at least on the phone, every day.
- ❁ Don't try to pretend that everything is fine. Don't try to make the holiday perfect for your children. It's better that you all acknowledge how you feel, and observe the holidays in a quiet, modest manner.
- ❁ Take time to commemorate loved ones who have died. Start some special rituals or traditions to remember them. Invite everyone in the family to participate.
- ❁ Well-meaning friends may give you advice about how to cope. Thank them politely, but don't feel obliged to follow their advice. No one knows as well as you do, what will work for *you*.
- ❁ If you are having serious financial problems, go easy on the gifts. Don't go deeper in debt. Your kids may be disappointed, but they won't be scarred for life.
- ❁ Are you ill or taking care of someone who is? Cut your obligations by half or more. Decide what are the most important things to do, and either delegate the rest or skip them.
- ❁ If you're far away from loved ones, and if all your acquaintances seem to have plans that don't include you, make plans on your own

to help others. Volunteer at your local soup kitchen, homeless shelter or hospital. You'll have a sense of purpose, and your help will be appreciated.

- ❁ What if you just can't bear the thought of going through the holidays? It's OK to entirely skip the holiday activities and celebrations this year. Things will not change drastically if you sit this one out.
- ❁ Bottom line: January will come eventually. Get through one day at a time. If holiday movies, holiday stories and holiday commercials make you feel worse, watch and listen to something else. There are many media choices with content unrelated to the holidays.
- ❁ If you are depressed, extremely lonely, and can't get through the day without crying, you may need professional help. It is recommended that you talk to a mental health professional. To find a psychologist near you, call the American Psychological Association: 1-800-964-2000



Self-help exercise

In the space below, make 3 decisions about what you will do and what you won't do during this difficult holiday time.

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Take care of yourself

Compassion for myself is the most powerful healer of them all.
-- Theodore Isaac Rubin, MD

During the holidays women, especially, are so focused on taking care of others and making the holiday perfect for everyone else, that they neglect themselves. Countless women have told me that they love to see other people reap the benefits of their efforts, but that they don't get to have fun themselves.

If you are stressed out or tense, no matter how beautiful your home looks or smells, the tension is what people notice first.

If you've ever flown on an airplane, you may recall that prior to taking off, the flight attendant gives safety instructions. She tells parents that in case of emergency they should put on their own oxygen masks before tending to their children. Parents who take care of themselves first are in a better position to take care of others.

The same is true at other times and in other situations, including the holidays.

Tips for self-care during the holidays (also before and after the holidays)

- ✿ Pace yourself. You may not get everything done. That would probably bother you more than it would bother anyone else. To put it in perspective, think of the trade-off: Would you rather stress yourself just so you "know it's perfect?" Or would you rather save your energy for something more important?
- ✿ Take scheduled breaks. Research has shown that people work more efficiently when breaks are built in to their schedule. When you take periodic rests you have more energy and get more done, despite the fact that the actual work time is slightly less.
- ✿ Set time limits for tasks that you don't enjoy much. Thus, if you are committed to visit crabby Aunt Bertha, decide how long you'll stay, and stick to the plan.
- ✿ Eat *good-for-you* food in balanced proportions. Too much sugar and fat makes you sluggish.
- ✿ As much as possible stick to a routine of sleep and exercise. Along with good nutrition, sleep and exercise help keep up your mental and physical energy.

- ❁ Limit alcohol. Drinking may help you feel better for the moment, but too much alcohol can disrupt normal sleep, lead to dehydration and uncomfortable hangovers.
- ❁ Don't take yourself too seriously. Allow yourself latitude for mistakes, imperfections and memory lapses. Be as tolerant of yourself as you are with others.
- ❁ If this is a lonely or otherwise difficult period in your life, give yourself permission to feel the sadness, but also focus on some things that you are grateful for.



Self-help exercise

In the space below, make 3 decisions about how you're going to take care of yourself, so that you will actually be able to enjoy the holidays.

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Conclusion

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

-- Maya Angelou

I hope that your holiday season is filled with more pleasure and joy than hassles and stress. Things will be better if you keep the following general points in mind:

- ❁ This is a celebration, not a performance or a competition.
- ❁ Appearances are not as important as you may think. No one cares if you gained weight, if your hair is not just so, or if your dishes don't match.
- ❁ Discuss plans and expectations with others. It's better to be clear about these, even if you don't agree with one another. If necessary, take it one step further and negotiate a compromise.
- ❁ What really matters: the relationships that you strengthen, the relationships that you help heal, and the new relationships that you form.
- ❁ What else really matters: laughter, joy, gratitude, tolerance
- ❁ Attitude plays a major role. How you feel depends a lot on how you *decide* to feel. The decision is up to you.

Thanks for reading this Holiday Survival Guide. I hope you find it useful. Please feel free to make copies - the only stipulation is that you may not change anything in this document. If you quote any passages from this guide, you must include the following acknowledgment:

From the Holiday Survival Guide by Pauline Wallin, Ph.D., 2006

About the author, Pauline Wallin, Ph.D.:

About me: I'm a psychologist and personal coach in Camp Hill, PA, in practice for over 30 years. I love working with people who are committed to getting more out of life.

Change doesn't have to be painful. Sometimes just a little tweak in your perspective can make a huge difference between merely tolerating a situation and mastering it.

My schedule currently has openings for a few highly motivated clients. Your referrals are welcome and appreciated.

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My books (available at my website, www.drwallin.com):

Taming Your Inner Brat: A Guide for Transforming Self-defeating Behavior

Co-author: *101 Great Ways to Improve your life*

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