

Holiday Health Tips?

Bah, Humbug

Every holiday season we hear the same advice: spend less, stress less, eat less. For some odd reason, less just never adds up. Here is the completely unapproved guide to enjoying the holidays.

by Dan Harvey

The holidays fast fall upon us, and 'tis the season when mental health experts offer up well-intentioned advice on how we can best cope with the attending pressures and anxieties—typically related to too much eating, drinking, spending and stressing out. As traditional as mistletoe and holly, they provide annual counsel couched in formats as simplistic as a child's Christmas wish list, but without the same precision.

God bless them everyone, but these experts tend to express our best interests in vague terms, delivering messages as meandering as a politician's answer to a debate question or as perfunctory as an athlete's clichéd response in a post-game interview. Advice is often delineated in a Top-Ten format, in David Letterman-style, but absent the humor or clarity. The worst of them are as cloying as a candy cane. In response to such saccharinity, here's an alternative-attitude holiday-help list developed with a skewed and Scrooged sensibility—and tongue planted in cheek.



Celebrate Stress. It's the American way! Many mental health experts suggest that the best way to eliminate holiday stress is through embracing and accepting it. But its elimination only negates the underlying electrical current that energizes American society. We thrive on stress! It keeps us at the top of our game. And if you're not for it, then you're against it. Does your projected Christmas budget cost you sleep? Rest easy, and just go out and shop, as George W. Bush suggested after 9/11. Max out those credit cards. The patriotic warmth that arises from your heart will carry you through the winter.

Be Inventive. Of course, not every Christmas will provide opportunities to satiate material lust. Perhaps the family breadwinner's job has been shipped out to China, and the holiday budget becomes tight. In that case, circumvent high expenditures by including elements of the Old World, traditional Christmases. For

instance, for children's gifts, think of purchasing "fireplace" stockings, and filling them with apples and oranges. When sons and daughters and nephews and nieces gaze up at you with confused glances (wondering when you're going to end the joke and pull out the real presents), just tell them that if they save the seeds and plant them in the ground, a tree will grow in its place and provide an ongoing abundance of fruit. And then underscore the message by quoting Randy Quaid's character from *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, "It's the gift that keeps on giving." They'll then gaze up at you with awe and appreciation, I'm sure.

Indulge—Without Guilt! Health care experts counsel us to exercise restraint when it comes to holiday feasts. But do you really want to deny yourself the seasonal cornucopia—all of the turkey, ham, duck, geese, chicken, roast beef, fish and vegetables, as well as the

Family Quarrels. Holiday celebrations can heighten family conflict. Here's the best way to address this issue: avoidance. Just don't go to family gatherings. Easier said than done, you say? Maybe not—as long as you have a good excuse. Try employing this clever holiday dodge: Explain to your extended and dysfunctional family that you don't believe that Jesus was born on Dec. 25 (Biblical scholarship will back up your assertion) and therefore you don't observe the holiday. They might think you're nuts, but you get to spend the entire day in bed, which is where we all would really like to be, anyway.

gravy-drenched dressing and mashed potatoes; or the fragrant fruits (served raw or flavoring the punches); or the pies pregnant with pumpkin, apple or berry fillings; or the irresistible cookies (chocolate chip, oatmeal, sugar, or peanut butter)? No, I didn't think so. But you can justify this barbaric overindulgence via genetic mechanisms that govern caloric expenditure—that is, the more you eat, the more rapid your metabolism. In fact, if you time the indulgence appropriately, you can make your body a calorie-burning furnace by the time you start your New Year's diet-and-exercise regimen. Weight-loss results will be phenomenal. Indeed, a Swedish physician designed a "whiplash" diet program around this concept.

Ritualized Celebrations. Experts suggest that you celebrate the holidays

by observing personal rituals. Many people accomplish this by watching favorite Christmas movies, such as *It's a Wonderful Life*. However, that particular film is not a smart choice, as it's really rather depressing (and mental health experts encourage you to avoid depression throughout the holidays). Despite its happy ending, which is kind of hard to swallow, the most powerful part of the movie—the passage that truly remains with the viewer—involves George Bailey's vision on how Bedford Falls was transformed into Pottersville. It represents a microcosm of what happened in post-WWII America; and, sadly, the transformation remains the only element of the film that really rings true. So, stick with the *Charlie Brown Christmas* special or *Mister Magoo's Christmas Carol* instead.

Revolutionary New Year's Resolution Idea.

However, the aforementioned complex dieting concept may be hard for the average individual to engineer, especially when trying to time it to a New Year



schedule. Indeed, New Year's resolutions, as health experts suggest, only add to the seasonal psychological pressure and typically foster failure. In turn, failure leads to guilt and depression. So, what's the best way to approach New Year's resolutions? Don't make any. It's a no-brainer.

Ignore This List. Yes, this and any other small-scale compendiums you may encounter that try and tell you how to enjoy the holiday season. After all, you're an adult and you've developed a keen awareness about what you like. No one really needs to tell you that the holidays are filled with annoyances, both infinite and infinitesimal, but we still look forward to them—and even manage to enjoy them—each year. Like Jeff Lebowski, we abide, through Christmases past, present and future, we abide. ☺



Get Enough Rest. Don't even think about it. This is one tidbit of advice that all mental health experts seem to agree upon, but do they not live in the real world? There are lists to be made, cookies to be baked, decorations to be arranged, shopping to be done, among many other seasonal activities that people expect us to accomplish. So who has time to rest?