

Merry Meditation & Mindfulness

It's almost a cliché to say the holidays can be stressful. Instead of peace and joy, the reality is we're often just trying to stay sane. Not everyone gets along, planes are delayed, there are queues at every corner, worries about money, sleep deprivation and dinners that get burnt—it's an emotional minefield.

That picture-perfect image of the holidays that you (and social media) build up in your mind, filled with expectations of how life should be, is rarely met for long and all this simply adds to the stress and

pressure you place on yourself. It's easy to get caught in the mental trap of the "comparing mind." You are constantly bombarded with illusions portrayed in shows, movies, on your friends' social feeds, or holiday advertisements, which end up raising expectations and pressure.

Instead of aiming for perfection and letting every detail cast you into bouts of worry, you can use the holidays to actively appreciate the people around you and your good fortune wherever you find it. Enjoy moments that feel like holiday bliss, and

find humour in the moments that clearly aren't. Even when things seemingly fall apart, there's often more to see.

Letting go of hard-and-fast expectations opens you up to more opportunities for connection and joy. Whether you regularly practice meditation, mindfulness or yoga, or not, the holidays are a perfect time to start. Take 10 minutes in the day, be it first thing in the morning, or stop when you are feeling overwhelmed and simply breathe.



Find a quiet spot indoors or outside, even if it's the bathroom floor and turn off your devices. Focus on your breath, relax. Take a deep breath in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds and breathe out for 4 seconds, pause for 4 seconds and repeat. This is called box breathing. The rhythmic, relaxed breathing pattern holds your focus.

Hold for 4 seconds

Breath in for 4 seconds  Breath out for 4 seconds

Relax and pause for 4 seconds

Once settled follow these steps below...

1 Start by settling your mind and body by following a relaxed breathing pattern. Mindfulness practice is an opportunity to build an ability



to observe without our normal reactive spirals. For a few moments, we take a break from escalating our holiday stress.

2 Check in. Notice whatever is going on for you right now, and then come back to the breath. Whether you feel stressed, relaxed, or anything else, for a moment, let it all be. Without judgment or expectation, just notice it all, and come back to the next breath.

3 Now, picture the next few weeks. Take a moment to notice what comes to mind when you picture the holiday season. How does your body feel? Is it tight, or restless, or even nauseated, or exhausted? Notice that, and let it be, and then come back to the breath.

4 Label emotions. What emotions arise? Maybe there is some mix of excitement and joy and dread and tiredness. Where do your thoughts go? Perhaps there's a conflicting swirl of pictures of what might be, stress over what seems possible, or ruminative planning over parties, presents and travel.

5 Relax into the breath. Right now, there's nothing to do, no one to be, nowhere to go. In this moment, sitting, this is all there is. There's time for acting or thinking later. Right now, take care of anything emergent, but otherwise let go of fixing and moving, and

focus on the next breath again.

6 Shift your attention to someone you care about. Now take a few moments to focus on your friends and family. Picture them, and wish them well, wherever they are, peace, or health, or safe travels.

7 Now focus on yourself. This is a time of stress, perhaps. Wish yourself whatever you did for your family ie. ease, or peace, or happiness. Take a moment to be grateful for whatever comes to mind.

8 Practice, letting go. That picture of the fancy meal, or that snub, or a storm derailing your plan—they're all just thoughts. Notice craving and the hungry ghost who always wants more. Label it all, simply note it but don't wrestle with it, and don't engage with it. Then come back to... Breathing in, and breathing out. Allow the holidays to happen. Take care to do whatever keeps you grounded, like sleep and exercise or walking the dog. Enjoy it, plan what needs planning, and let go of the rest. Focus instead on whatever you value and find most sustaining at this time of year.

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