Time out: making the most of the holidays

Parties, shopping, eating, drinking, entertaining, more parties, fighting for parking at the mall, more shopping, wrapping, cooking, more eating…



If this all sounds too frighteningly familiar, you've probably been hit by the seasonal bug known to most as the holiday time crunch. The condition usually deprives you of rest, time for yourself and even, ironically, time with those you care about most. Fortunately, with a little preparation and a little resolve this condition is completely preventable.

Plan practically. Don't fool yourself into thinking you'll really be able to attend four parties on the same night. Sit down and take a close look at your schedule. Prioritize and map out a holiday calendar that's realistic and gives you some flexibility and room to breathe.

Dole tasks out. It's easy to get so caught up in your list that you forget there are many around ready to help. Change DIY duties into DIWO (do it with others) by asking family and friends to lend a hand. Make that extended family dinner you're hosting a potluck, enlist children to help out with gift wrapping or leave your partner in charge of running those pesky errands while you finish up the seasonal shopping.

Get creative with multitasking. Shop for gifts online while your holiday treats are baking, sign greeting cards as you wait for the kids' hockey practice to end or dust the furniture as you chat on the phone. Effective multitasking can help you get through that "to do" list a little faster and free up some precious time to spend with your family.

Make *me* time. It may seem to go against holiday instincts, but scheduling time out for yourself is one of the best gifts you can give to everyone. Remember: burning the candle at both ends will not only leave you exhausted, it'll probably make you feel pretty down towards the season. By taking a few hours of down time you'll be relaxed, recharged and ready to face the holiday season—and family and friends—with revitalized cheer.

Get help. If your budget allows, why not give yourself the gift of time and hire someone to help out. Whether it's contracting a maid service to do the big holiday clean, paying the teenager down the street to shovel your drive, or ordering healthy pre-made meals from a personal chef service, enlisting outside assistance will add hours to your clock and reduce your stress levels.

Say "*No*"… nicely. Many people have trouble setting social limits during this season. Can't stand the thought of attending yet another open house? Send a "sorry I can't make it" note and a small gift for the hosts well in advance of the event. Feeling consumed by weekly office holiday cocktail parties? Politely refuse the invite and offer to organize a get-together in the quieter months of January or February instead. Saying "no" isn't easy, but if done with thoughtfulness and care it can spare you the time-crunching conundrum of saying "yes."

Rekindle holiday spirit. Schedule at least one night a week to sit back, relax and enjoy the people you love. Whether it's a family ice-skate outing, a casual movie night with friends, or a "board game night" with the neighbours and their kids, create opportunities for shared down time.

During all the hustle and bustle it's easy to forget the true meaning of the season. But by taking a few moments to prioritize, you'll avoid the holiday crunch and discover that time really can be on your side, even during the busy holiday season.