

12 DAZE of CHRISTMAS

Find yourself in a seasonal stupor?
Here are your festive fixes. | by ASTRID VAN DEN BROEK



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ON THE FIRST DAY OF CHRISTMAS, MY TRUE LOVE GAVE TO ME...

A stressed-out shopper? A credit card pushed to its limits? If this sounds familiar, keep reading. The festive season leaves many of us dazed and confused rather than de-stressed and calm, which can lead to an assortment of health and wellness issues. We can help you get a handle on your holidays and turn shock into awe with this list of seasonal strategies.

1

YOUR DIGESTIVE SYSTEM FEELS CONFUSED

Eating too many rich desserts and salty snacks can leave you feeling bloated and/or constipated because they are made with refined flour and have little fibre. “The bowel likes a routine, and we get in trouble with regularity around this time of year because our schedule gets off track,” says Gina Sunderland, a registered dietitian based in Winnipeg. Try kicking your day off with a fibre-filled breakfast, such as bran cereal sprinkled on yogurt or flax whirled into a smoothie. (All-Bran packs eight grams of fibre per serving, while one tablespoon of ground flaxseed has more than two grams of fibre.) “And for fibre to work, we also need fluid,” she adds. So, tip back the water regularly to keep things moving down under.

3



YOU'RE FLUSTERED BY THE FLURRY OF FESTIVE CHORES

Sounds like you need some mindful thinking. “Even if you're out shopping for a gift, you can take a quiet moment to reground yourself during the chaos,” says Melissa Colleret, a life coach who works virtually from coast to coast. If sitting in your car doing this pre-shop doesn't work, download a meditation app, such as 5 Minute Relaxation or Quick Guided Meditations Pro, to help you out. And while you're taking a moment to meditate, consider the reason for the season, says Colleret. “Remember to appreciate what's great about the holidays, like family, friends and food,” she says.

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YOUR BANK ACCOUNT IS SHOCKINGLY LOW

You promise to spend less every year, but then you see the cutest-ever, custom-made thingamajig and, well, there goes the budget – again. Sigh, what's a shopper to do? Pinterest is packed with holiday budgeting ideas. Buy a gift card every paycheque for holiday gifts or use a printable budget planner. Or, approach gift-giving differently this year. “Instead of spending hundreds of dollars on gifts, focus on reconnecting with loved ones,” says Jessica Moorhouse, the voice behind the Mo' Money podcast. Also, try reframing this year's gift-giving. “Last year, my family tried a gift exchange with the seven people in our family,” she says. “We drew names and it wasn't any less fun. If anything, a huge burden was lifted because we weren't pressured to spend more and we could really find a thoughtful gift for the person we were buying for.”

4

YOUR SLEEP IS SUFFERING

There's nothing like a mid-week fete to throw you off your sleep game. Try to maintain your bedtime schedule as much as you can, says Dr. Mel Borins, a family physician based in Toronto and author of *Go Away Just for the Health of It*. “Get back to the schedule you're used to and wake up at your usual time in the morning,” he says. “Don't sleep in to make up for it because you're tired from the night before.” Also, if you're having trouble sleeping at night, resist the temptation to crash on the couch after work, which can thwart your sleep later on. Finally, practise good sleep hygiene. “That means your bed is for sex or sleep only,” he says. “No TV, laptop, reading or cellphone in there. Avoid screen time for 30 minutes before bed, too.”

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YOUR HEALTHY-EATING LIFESTYLE HAS GONE AWRY

Just like you would never go to the grocery store hungry, don't party on an empty stomach either. The best tip? Make friends with snacks, says Sunderland. Keep a good stash of portable fruit (apples or even holiday mandarins, but avoid bananas because they can bung you up) or homemade trail mix (filled with vitamin E-rich nuts) to fill up on before you head out to the office bash.



YOU'RE ALREADY ON YOUR SECOND COLD

Let's review cold-and-flu-prevention basics: The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends getting your flu shot and washing your hands regularly to keep germs at bay. But boosting your immune system can also help fight them off. "Vitamin C helps the body build healthy white blood cells, particularly neutrophils," says Sunderland. "Those are our fighter cells." Vitamin C is packed into citrus fruits, kiwi and red peppers. And go easy on the alcohol – it drains your immune system function. "At parties, try keeping a glass of soda water in your dominant hand so that you're less likely to consume alcohol," suggests Sunderland.



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YOU'RE SUPER-STRESSED FROM SEASONAL ERRANDS

Decorating, baking, shopping, organizing kids' schedules – the to-do list is longer than the season. It's no wonder stress often spikes during the holidays. The fix? Prioritize self-care. "Being healthy will support you," says Dr. Borins. "Pay special attention to your diet, for example, or take time to book a relaxing massage or any pleasurable activity, like meeting with friends." Build time in your schedule to try some calming activities, such as yoga and tai chi, or sweat out your stress if you prefer (a good long run can help your mind and body).

8

YOU'RE TOO BUSY TO EVEN THINK ABOUT EXERCISE

Think express options, says Rod Macdonald, vice-president of Canfitpro. Can't get in your usual 60-minute exercise class? "Go for a 20-minute treadmill workout and up the intensity a little," he suggests. Also, look for new ways to move, like playing outside. "If you live near a toboggan hill, for example, turn your time with the kids into a workout," he says. "Sliding down and walking up a hill 10 times burns more calories than you think."

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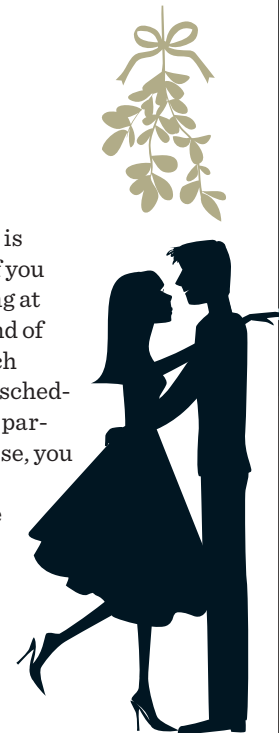
YOUR ANXIETY IS FLARING UP

December can be one long seasonal shindig, and just the thought of navigating a crowd or having to participate in small talk can ratchet up your anxiety levels. Talk to your doctor for treatment options before the party circuit starts, and know that you're not alone. The Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada notes that 25 percent of Canadians will have an anxiety disorder in their lifetime. Social anxiety disorder, which involves being excessively afraid of social situations, is a serious condition. Your health-care practitioner can help you explore treatment options, which range from medications to cognitive behavioural therapy. In the meantime, anxietycanada.ca is the place to start getting informed.

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YOU'VE HARDLY SEEN YOUR PARTNER

"Taking care of your relationship is hugely important because both of you are probably exhausted and sitting at opposite ends of the sofa by the end of the holidays, just wanting to watch what's on TV," says Colletet. Try scheduling time together alongside the parties and gift exchanges. "Otherwise, you fly by the seat of your pants. And when something needs to be done – a last-minute errand – couple time is the first thing to be sacrificed," she says. Also, set boundaries on your time together. Put your phones down and make your time together fun, not about discussing day care issues or credit card bills.



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YOUR FOURTH-QUARTER DEADLINES + PARTY INVITES = A TIZZY

Prioritize with a plan, says Colletet. "Make a list of all the things you have to do," she says. This includes everything from major tasks (shopping for Santa's gifts) to minor ones (scooping up more wrapping paper). Prioritize them and plug them into your schedule – that way, you can carve out a three-hour purposeful shopping trip. "Getting it out of your head and putting it on paper can help your mind function freely," says Colletet.



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YOUR STRUGGLE WITH DEPRESSION IS PEAKING

Sometimes the happiest days trigger the saddest feelings. The Mayo Clinic suggests getting in front of your depression as much as possible. Be proactive, acknowledging your feelings and trying not to isolate yourself. "It's helpful to have people around you to boost your spirits," says Dr. Borins. "It's an opportunity to strengthen relationships. Generally, people are in a loving, holiday spirit during the holiday season, and it's a great time to reconnect." *dr*