

Sixty Seconds to Calm

Superfast meditations to help you cope with the challenges of the holiday season.

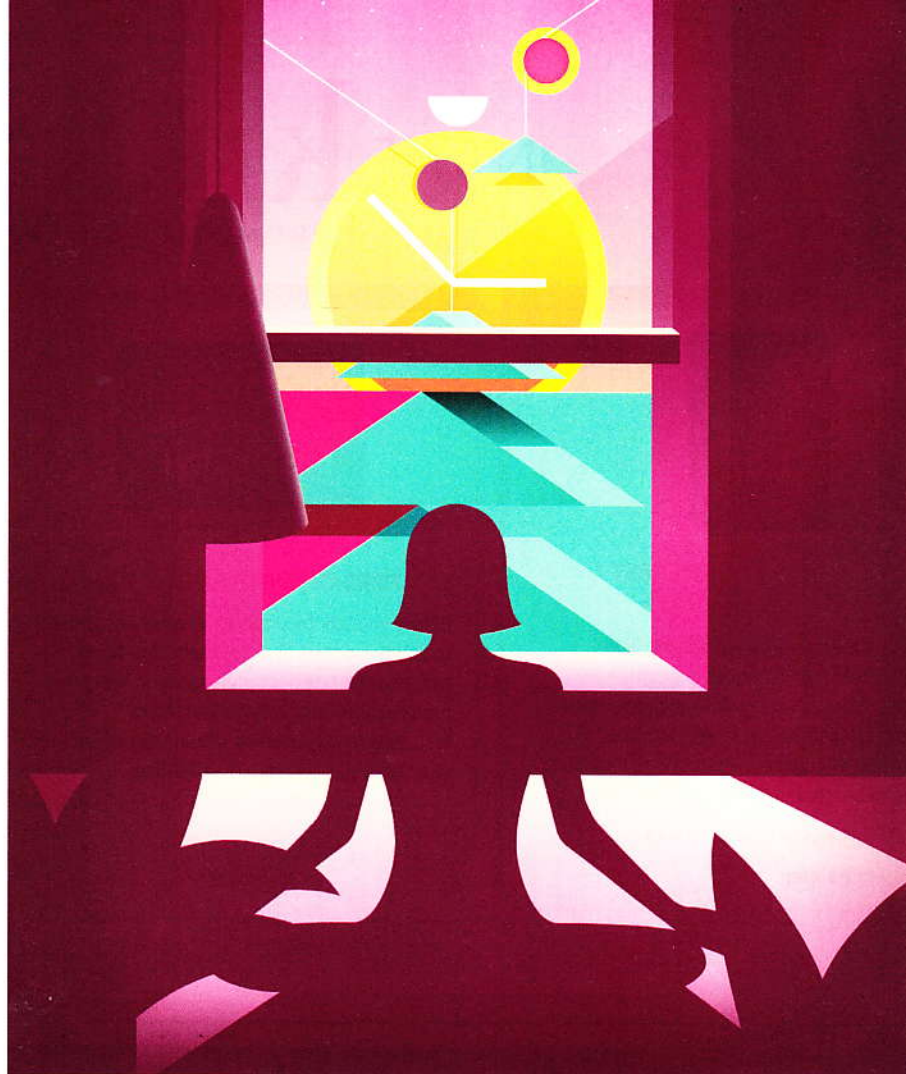
➔ "PEOPLE THINK THE HOLIDAYS are supposed to be the happiest time of the year, but for many of us, it's stressapalooza," says Dean Sluyter, who has taught meditation for more than 40 years and is author of *Natural Meditation: A Guide to Effortless Meditative Practice*. The good news: Meditation can make it easier to reclaim your jolly—and you don't have to sit in a dark room waiting for your thoughts to clear. If you've got a minute to spare (and come on, you do), spending that time on your mind-set may help you be more peaceful and compassionate. We asked experts for mental exercises tailored to common holiday stress points:

YOU FEEL: As though you're going to be high-strung from Christmas madness for the entire month of December.

TRY THIS: "Head to the nearest window and look outside," advises Sluyter. "Soften your gaze and regard the total sensory overload around you—the Christmas music, the shoppers jostling for position in the checkout line, the buzzing of your phone—as a tapestry of background noise. Don't try to quiet it. This is a Tibetan technique called sky-gazing. When you let go of the idea that you're going to shush the outside world, you will start to relax. The true silence is inside you."

YOU FEEL: Awkward at holiday gatherings.

TRY THIS: "Before the party, sit quietly and mentally repeat the mantra *May I be happy; may I be peaceful*," says Sharon Salzberg, cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society and author of *Real Happiness at Work*:



Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement, and Peace. "Keep repeating those words as you breathe, almost as a way of hugging yourself. If your mind wanders, that's okay. Just remember to bring your attention back to the phrase."

YOU FEEL: So scatterbrained that you can't enjoy the moment.

TRY THIS: "Sit down with your feet on the ground, and draw your attention to the sensation of your soles against the floor. Then, listen to the sounds around you: Maybe it's the clank of silverware layered over your grandmother talking layered over music in the background," says Buddhist nun Janet Nima Taylor, author of *Meditation for Non-Meditators*. "Next go to other senses: What do you smell? What do you see? You don't have to find joy in each sense; the goal is simply to be aware of what is happening around you. In the process, you'll train yourself to be fully present."

YOU FEEL: Anxious about a marathon evening with a difficult family member.

TRY THIS: "Before you have to deal with the obnoxious uncle or narcissistic mother-in-law, sit for a minute with your eyes closed and visualize that person as an adorable toddler," says Sluyter. "Really visualize what they would look like, how they might smile. This sweet part is still in them somewhere—even if they've lost touch with it. Then, when they start to grate on your nerves, think back to this meditation. Is your uncle being a jerk? That's just the baby acting out. By framing your interactions in this context, it's easier to have patience."

YOU FEEL: Paralyzed by all your holiday obligations (the cooking! the parties! the gift swaps!).

TRY THIS: "Unitask—mindfully," Salzberg says. "Instead of drinking tea while responding to emails, take one minute to just drink the tea. Or walk from the parking lot to the store without looking at your phone. You'll feel more centered and settled in your being, and the next thing you do, you'll do better." —KATE ROCKWOOD