

## LET IT GO

**Reject FOMO.** Curling up on the couch with a book and a cup of tea sounds like bliss—until you scroll through social media. That's when the dreaded Fear of Missing Out strikes. *So many holiday parties tonight—am I the only one cozying up at home? And why is no one texting me back?* In the B.F. (Before Facebook) era, our evolutionary need to compare ourselves got a break when we were alone. Now you can size up your quiet Saturday night next to the social plans of 300+ online friends. Give FOMO the heave-ho by leaving your phone in the kitchen while you get the me time you need.

### Ditch your least-favorite tradition.

Our holiday habits are the glue that holds seasonal gatherings (and moderately dysfunctional families) together. But cleaning up oil splatters can suck the joy out of making latkes, and chattering teeth can make caroling less *fa-la-la*. Reignite your excitement by switching one thing up—host a Yankee Swap, for instance, or play charades with holiday phrases. It's true that other family members may not be so quick to jump on the tradition-change bandwagon, and if your gang is set on baking Christmas cookies, put on a smile and oblige. But once a batch is out of the oven, it's time for your new candy-cane scavenger hunt.

### Enough with the dutiful holiday cards.

If printing family snapshots, stuffing envelopes, and mailing them off to distant relatives and casual friends brings you joy, have at it. The rest of us are due for something different. Bypass the greetings cards, move the holiday list to your phone, and instead call one person a day throughout the season. Fit it in while walking the dog or washing the dishes to actually catch up, voice to voice.

Sources: Margaret Duffy, Ph.D., professor, University of Missouri; Mindy Greenstein, Ph.D., clinical psychologist; Jana Martin, Ph.D., family psychologist; Sheela Raja, Ph.D., clinical psychologist, professor, University of Illinois at Chicago

**End hostess frenzy.** When a well-mannered guest asks, “Can I help with anything?” say yes for a change. We get it: When you’re in the weeds with the details, it can seem more stressful to delegate than to just do it all yourself. But if you, say, ask your music-loving cousin to bring the playlist, she’ll feel flattered that you trust her taste. And your antsy mother-in-law will happily keep busy pouring wine and decaf. Tip them with a hug when the evening’s over.

## Forget Norman Rockwell, folks.

Remember, it’s often the mistakes and groaners that make the season special, and if you fret about creating idealized moments, you could miss out on the charm of what’s actually happening—like that time when you put the wrong hour on the party invite and had to greet guests in your bathrobe, or when five different people brought pie to the potluck and there wasn’t a veggie in sight. That’s what you’ll still be talking about come *next* Christmas.

IF THE SEASON OF JINGLE BELLS GIVES YOU JANGLED NERVES, YOU MAY NEED TO CUT BACK (JUST A BIT!) ON THE USUAL OBLIGATIONS. SEVEN SANITY-SAVING STRATEGIES WILL HELP YOU FEEL A LITTLE MORE JOLLY AND A LOT LESS STRESSED.

BY KATE ROCKWOOD ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREN HOM

**Trim your looming list.** During the holidays, minimalists we are not. A typical agenda: Buy gifts for coworkers, bake cookies, decorate the house, bake more cookies, drive around looking at other decorated houses—phew! This year, pare down the madness and list three goals, like making your special spice cake or avoiding a political squabble with your brother-in-law. Once you’ve checked off those items, consider everything else a bonus.

**Relieve some peer pressure.** 'Tis the season to be overwhelmed by calendar invites and social obligations. Here’s a novel idea: Decline—just a few. Instead of saying yes to another shindig you don’t have the energy for this month, set up plans for one-on-one get-togethers in January instead. Then it’s not about opting *out* of something but opting *into* something else that you want to do and find meaningful. And you’ll have dates to look forward to in the New Year to banish any postholiday blues.