

THE CENTER for CLINICAL MASSAGE

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Beat stress this Christmas season

Six tips to help you relax

Christmas brings the fun — and the pressure — of parties, family gatherings, and gift-giving. You may do too much, carry too many groceries and gifts, and worry about meeting everyday responsibilities and seasonal expectations. This can lead to aching shoulders, a stiff neck or low back pain, as well as sore arms and feet. Here are some tips for relaxation during this busy time.

1. Avoid carrying a heavy bag on one shoulder only, which can lead to spasms in your shoulder and neck and throw off your posture, often resulting in back problems.
2. Slow down, put your feet up, and breathe deeply, even if you can only relax for 15 minutes.
3. Set boundaries. Remember you can't do it all. Plan to only do the Christmas activities you really enjoy. Even if it's a creative task like making cards or baking cookies, if it feels like a burden, try to let it go.
4. Remember to exercise. If it seems like too much to get to the gym or walk your usual circuit, meet a friend in a festive shopping area and walk an extra few blocks while you window shop. Or take the family or neighbor out on foot to see the Christmas displays. Moving vigorously for at least 20 minutes can reduce tension and even help you sleep better.
5. If you have children or grandchildren, remember the simplest things can sometimes mean the most to them and to the child in you. Read a favorite Christmas story or join them in singing their favorite songs. For a little while, forget the plans and presents, and experience the precious moments.



Counter the effects of stress with energetic family play.

6. Take an afternoon or evening to enjoy being rather than doing. Immerse yourself in a favorite activity for a few hours, whether that's reading in front of the fireplace, strolling in the woods or through a museum, or getting a facial or pedicure.



Massage can boost immunity and help relieve chronic muscle tension.

Unwind with massage

Destress and stay healthy this Christmas

Are you anxious about your social and family obligations this Christmas? Having trouble taking time for yourself? Many people cancel their massage appointments this time of the year — just when they need it most. But massage can be the best gift you give yourself.

Massage can help you let go, breathe deeply, and bring you back to balance. If your feet or back hurt from standing while cooking and shopping, ask for extra attention in those areas to relieve muscle tension and pain. Massage is known for its ability to release chronic tension before it causes muscle use imbalances that can lead to injuries. Studies show that massage can even boost the immune system!

So you can avoid injuries and the flu at the same time you relax and rejuvenate the mind.

Remember, massage may be just the ticket to help you relieve stress and stay healthy — so that you can get the most enjoyment from Christmas. You may even want to plan an extra massage to help unwind in the middle of the Christmas rush.

Soaking away the winter blues

Create a bath for relaxation and celebration

There's nothing better than to soak in a warm bath if you're chilled, overwhelmed or exhausted. You can combine a bath with your massage by soaking for a few minutes beforehand, or taking a longer one with Epsom salts after. Or just treat yourself by turning an evening bath into a spa experience. Here are some ideas.

- Add up to 10 drops of essential oil to a warm bath, and swish. Lavender, mandarin orange and geranium are wonderful stress reducers. Use only pure, high-quality oils.
- Place a tablespoon or more herbs in a tea ball, and let it steep in the bath before you step in. Chamomile or lavender flowers, and rosemary or thyme leaves, or a combination of these, are aromatic and promote relaxation.
- To rehydrate dry skin, make sure the water is warm, but not too hot, and add 1 tablespoon of a good quality oil such as jojoba, avocado or grapeseed.



- To ease a chill, help reduce congestion and make you feel warm all over, try a ginger-mustard bath. Mix 1 cup Epsom or sea salts, 1 cup powdered milk and 1/2 cup dry mustard or ground mustard seed. Add 1/4 cup grated ginger, stir and let the mixture sit for 5 minutes. Pour it into a warm bath and mix well.
- Just before sliding into a warm, aromatic bath, light a candle scented with pure essential oils of pine, spruce, balsam fir or ginger. Remember that this time of year has been an occasion to celebrate the lengthening of daylight for centuries. Candlelight is a traditional way to honor this human connection to the cycles of nature. If you like, say a short prayer or wish for peace as you light your candle.



*May the spirit of Christmas
bring you peace, The gladness
of Christmas give you hope,
The warmth of Christmas
grant you love.
—Author Unknown*