

inspiration



Holiday Happiness Helpers

Six Ways to Bring On Joy

by James Baraz

To truly enjoy the holidays, try these simple, research-based practices to maintain a healthy state of mind.

1 Set an intention to enjoy the holidays. By making the conscious decision to be open to true well-being and happiness, we'll be more likely to have our "antenna" up, so we're alert to uplifting moments.

2 Savor moments of well-being. Beyond being grateful for feeling good, savor how the experience registers in body, mind and spirit for a period of 15 or 30 seconds. The longer we hold an emotionally stimulating experience in our awareness, the more neural connections form in our brains to strengthen it in memory.

3 Take a break to regain focus. If we are feeling overwhelmed by everything on the to-do list, remember to take a few deep breaths. Then take a break and enjoy a cup of tea or a hot bath. Try some yoga or exercise. Leave the holiday activity mode for a bit and just relax.

4 Practice gratitude. Rather than take good fortune for granted, consciously reflect upon all the blessings apparent in each day. When we directly express appreciation to loved ones and friends while we're with them, everyone feels the joy of the loving connection.

5 Practice generosity. Neuroscience research shows that performing an altruistic act lights up the same pleasure centers in the brain as food and sex. When an impulse to be generous arises, act on it and notice the expansive feeling that blesses us when we share.

6 Play and have fun. The holidays allow us to let ourselves feel like we did when we were kids. Be around children if possible. Tune into and take delight in their enthusiasm. Singing or dancing is an excellent way to move out of our head and open our heart to the joy within.

Remember that happiness is contagious: If we're happy, we increase the odds that close friends and family will be happy, too.

James Baraz is a co-founding teacher of the Spirit Rock Meditation Center, in Woodacre, CA, and co-author of Awakening Joy: 10 Steps That Will Put You on the Road to Real Happiness and Awakening Joy for Kids: A Hands-On Guide for Grown-Ups to Nourish Themselves and Raise Mindful, Happy Children. Connect at AwakeningJoy.info.

The Holiday Secret

Based on his study What Makes for a Merry Christmas?, psychologist Tim Kasser told the American Psychological Association: "[Our study] found that to the extent people focused their holiday season around materialistic aims like spending and receiving, the less they were focused on spiritual aims... We also found people reported 'merrier' Christmases when spirituality was a large part of their holiday, but reported lower Christmas well-being to the extent that the holiday was dominated by materialistic aspects."

