

topics

holidays past

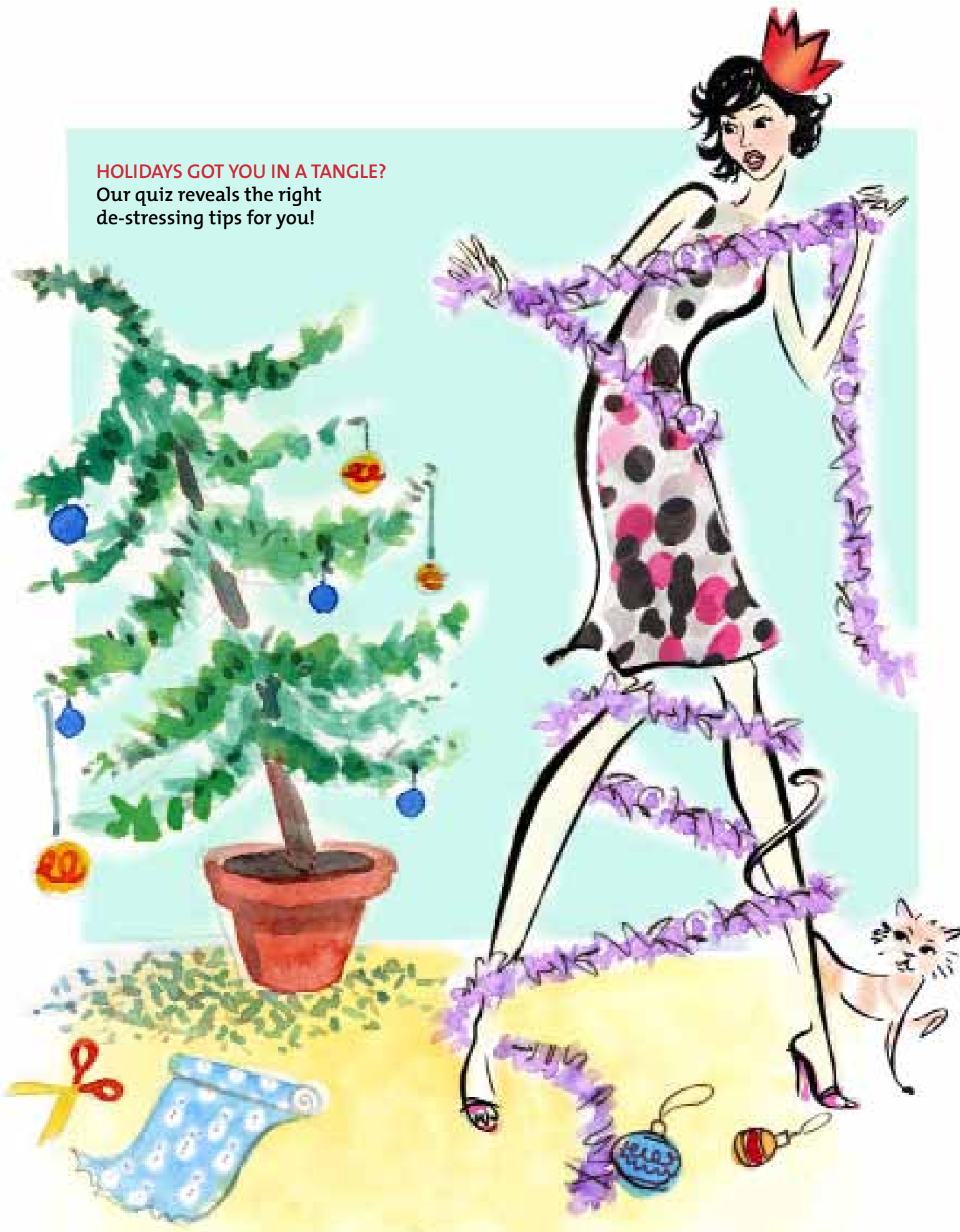
choosing gifts

family bonds

party time

**HOLIDAYS GOT YOU IN A TANGLE?**

Our quiz reveals the right de-stressing tips for you!



# ARE YOU HEADED FOR THE **HOLIDAY** BLUES?

*It's time again to be crazy-busy, thanks to holiday parties, shopping and an overwhelming to-do list. Are you taking steps to avoid burnout? Read on for our insightful de-stressing tips – and enjoy the season this year!*

The statistics would make even Santa scowl: Nearly two-thirds of women report some depression around the holidays, and according to the American Psychological Association, the number who worry over how to pay for the festivities is reaching record highs. Not to mention that stress



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# ARE YOU HEADED FOR THE HOLIDAY BLUES?

American Psychological Association, the number who worry over how to pay for the festivities is reaching record highs. Not to mention that stress in general is on the rise, causing people to fight more, eat and drink too much and generally feel beaten down. “Stress accumulates in our bodies, affecting our hormones, immune response and mental health,” says Deborah Rozman, Ph.D., co-author of *Transforming Stress* (New Harbinger Publications, 2005). “Soon everything takes on extra significance and drama.” Since the last thing you need this season is extra drama, take our quiz to highlight what causes you to panic, then tap into dozens of ways to keep anxiety from sapping your holiday cheer.

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## HOLIDAYS PAST

What was the best part of your holidays last year?

A

### TRADITIONS

Following holiday rituals from years past with loved ones.



B

### NO WORK

Just getting a break from the office craziness!



C

### NOTHING!

Everything got out of control and I fell off the exercise-and-diet wagon.



CLICK ON THE ANSWER (ABOVE) THAT BEST SUITS YOU.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ANSWERS](#)



1

2

3

A

## TRADITIONS

Following holiday rituals from years past with loved ones.



**INSIGHT** Holiday rituals can provide a sense of belonging that boosts your mental and physical health, says Barbara Fiese, Ph.D., director of the [Family Resiliency Center](#) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and author of *Family Routines and Rituals* (Yale University Press, 2006). But over time they can become obligations, she warns.

If you're overwhelmed by tasks surrounding your traditions, ask your family to list three things they really look forward to and three things they wouldn't mind giving up. "It's rarely the time-consuming or expensive things that matter most," Fiese says. "More often it's the recipe or the story or the inside joke that makes our family unique."

[CLICK HERE TO GO TO NEXT QUESTION](#)

**B**

## NO WORK

Just getting a break from the office craziness!



**INSIGHT** While you may think a better boss is the ticket to on-the-job joy, research from the [Mayo Clinic](#) suggests that it's time spent on purposeful tasks.

In a study of 437 physicians, those who spent at least 20 percent of their work time on the duty they found most meaningful were half as likely to experience burnout as other subjects.

Focus first on making your boss feel supported, says career coach [Cynthia Shapiro](#), MBA, PHR. "Say, 'What are the three most important things I can do to help you?'" After that, determine what's vital to the company, and figure out ways to effect that. "Then, you're golden," Shapiro says. The rest of the time you can focus on work tasks you enjoy.

C

## NOTHING!

Everything got out of control and I fell off the exercise-and-diet wagon.



**INSIGHT** “I continually hear people say, ‘I’m going to do things differently next year,’” says John O’Neill, licensed clinical social worker with the **Menninger Clinic** in Houston. “But they don’t follow through, and they end up exhausted — yet again.” If this sounds like you, remind yourself of your main goal (for instance, making sure your kids have a good holiday). “If you connect with the reason behind everything you’re doing, it’s hard to get too wrapped up in the wrong things,” says Fred Luskin, Ph.D., co-author of *Stress Free for Good* (HarperOne, 2006).

And don’t forget to keep up with your workouts: Those who exercise two days a week or more are happier and less stressed than their more sedentary peers.

## CHOOSING GIFTS

The aspect of gift giving that causes you the most stress is:

A

### MONEY

Affording it. I have a long list.



B

### PERFECTION

Selecting the "right" gift for each person.



C

### TIME

Finding the hours in the day to shop.



CLICK ON THE ANSWER (ABOVE) THAT BEST SUITS YOU.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ANSWERS](#)



1

2

3







B

## PERFECTION

Selecting the “right” gift for each person.



**INSIGHT** It’s a legit concern — 83 percent of us receive unwanted gifts each year, according to a 2008 survey by eBay. Gift cards are an obvious solution, but one-fourth of Americans think they’re impersonal. To make them more special, package the card with complementary accessories, such as earrings paired with a gift card to a clothing boutique.

Another tack: Look up ideas on [Gifts.com](https://www.gifts.com), which suggests items based on personality and hobbies, or use VIV’s gift guide (see page 28) to find presents that support the recipients’ favorite causes.

Vet gift ideas at [Buzzillions.com](https://www.buzzillions.com). The site aggregates customer reviews from 3,000 sites and creates a helpful “review snapshot.”

C

## TIME

Finding the hours in the day to shop.



**INSIGHT** According to a survey by Visa, four out of five people expect to spend up to three hours researching and buying a single gift (11 percent say they'll spend up to six hours!). Luckily, more and more large retailers, from **Lowe's** to **Nordstrom**, allow you to purchase an item online and pick it up at your local store, sans shipping costs.

To beat crowds, shop during stores' early morning or late extended hours. And try to delegate some of the shopping to other family members, suggests John O'Neill, licensed clinical social worker with the **Menninger Clinic** in Houston. "Women still tend to take on an enormous amount over the holidays, and they're generally more stressed than men to begin with."

## FAMILY BONDS

Thinking about spending time with relatives causes me to feel:

A

### ANXIETY

I'm overcome with full-on dread.



B

### HUNGRY

I suddenly crave comfort food – and lots of it.



C

### SKITTISH

My flight response kicks in at the thought of seeing certain relatives.



CLICK ON THE ANSWER (ABOVE) THAT BEST SUITS YOU.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ANSWERS](#)



1

2

3



A

## ANXIETY

I'm overcome with full-on dread.



**INSIGHT** Holiday scenarios tend to play out the same year after year, which means you can anticipate when emotions will get heated and skip out just beforehand. “The signal can be, ‘The baby sitter needs to get home,’” says John O’Neill, licensed clinical social worker with the [Menninger Clinic](#) in Houston. “Having a plan is an enormous anxiety reducer.”

If your extended family generally lingers too long, O’Neill suggests telling them that you’re looking forward to seeing them, but this year it’s only going to work out for three days. And try to exercise your compassion. “Recognize that your family members may be experiencing their own challenges,” says Deborah Rozman, Ph.D., co-author of [Transforming Stress](#) (New Harbinger Publications, 2005).

**B**

## HUNGRY

I suddenly crave comfort food – and lots of it.



**INSIGHT** Research shows sugary and fatty foods may blunt the anxiety and negative feelings triggered by stress hormones. Unfortunately, they also ultimately increase your chances of health problems, which can lead to even more stress. Instead of reaching for the desserts when you're pushed to the limit, take a brisk walk. According to the University of Exeter in England, a 15-minute spurt of physical activity can reduce chocolate cravings (it's true!).

Another calorie-free alternative: Try "heart-centered" breathing, says Deborah Rozman, Ph.D., co-author of *Transforming Stress* (New Harbinger Publications, 2005). Focus on the area around your heart, breathe deeply and think about a time or thing that makes you feel happy, such as a special trip or a cherished pet.



## SKITTISH

My flight response kicks in at the thought of seeing certain relatives.



**INSIGHT** Opting out is one way to avoid unpleasantness, says Barbara Fiese, Ph.D., director of the [Family Resiliency Center](#) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and author of *Family Routines and Rituals* (Yale University Press, 2006). However, “the cost is breaking relationships with an entire group, when perhaps the difficulty is with just one person,” she says. If you’re not ready to totally go AWOL, consider changing locale.

“Try going to a neutral place, such as a restaurant,” Fiese says. If you’re not with family, engaging in rituals with friends can confer similar benefits of belonging, she adds. Throwing a “reading” party, in which everyone brings a favorite story to share, is one way to relish the season.

## PARTY TIME

Your approach to the party-invite triage involves saying:

A

**YES!**

In this economy, I want to take advantage of every opportunity to network.



B

**MAYBE**

I've put on some pounds and don't have anything to wear!



C

**NO THANKS**

I'm just not in the mood.



CLICK ON THE ANSWER (ABOVE) THAT BEST SUITS YOU.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ANSWERS](#)



1

2

3



A

**YES!**

In this economy, I want to take advantage of every opportunity to network.



**INSIGHT** Surprisingly, the holidays are a busy recruiting season, says career coach **Cynthia Shapiro**, MBA, PHR. So if your position is at risk, mingling over eggnog isn't a bad idea. "Collect and give out as many business cards as possible," she says. And don't forget your manners: "No one ever thanks the higher-ups for company parties, and they cost a fortune," she says.

While schmoozing may be important to your career, make time for gatherings with good friends or regular activities you like as well. Not surprisingly, a 2009 study of 1,400 adults found that the more time people spent doing a variety of enjoyable activities, the lower their stress-hormone levels were.



**B**

## MAYBE

I've put on some pounds and don't have anything to wear!



**INSIGHT** If you feel like nothing fits you, you're probably right: In a study of more than 6,300 women, a mere 8 percent had the "hourglass" figure that fashion designers cater to. Fortunately for women of average size — and in the United States, that means a 14 — there are some progressive designers that offer fashion-forward apparel in sizes 12 and up, including [Igigi](#), [Kiyonna](#), [MICHAEL Michael Kors](#), [Missphit](#) and [Rachel Pally White Label](#).

Pay attention to the fit, not the size, and come party day, focus on how you feel. Constantly checking yourself in the mirror or comparing your appearance to others will steal energy that could be better put to use on the dance floor or laughing with friends.

C

## NO THANKS

I'm just not in the mood.



**INSIGHT** It's all right to avoid events when making merry is out of sync with how you're feeling. If you're going through a breakup or dealing with an illness or death, for example, ask others for their understanding when you say no.

Just remember that feeling isolated is a threat to well-being, says Fred Luskin, Ph.D., co-author of *Stress Free for Good* (HarperOne, 2006), so be sure to share your worries with at least one close friend or family member. The "holiday blues" are common, but if you can't shake them after the holidays pass, your problems may be more severe. Tell your doctor how you're feeling, or find a psychologist on the American Psychological Association's [website](#).

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