

HAPPY HOLIDAYS?

- Deciding Which Traditions **to Keep and Which to Toss**

If you find yourself dreading the holidays, it may be time to make some changes. Becoming more mindful of what you do and buy can help you create a holiday you actually enjoy. The tools below help you do that.

Which holidays do you enjoy?

1

2

3

4

5

Which holidays do you dislike?

1

2

3

4

5

You may want to consider celebrating these holidays differently.

Drew's story gives you an example of how to make changes.

Mindfulness Helps You Create a Real Holiday

Every year, Drew declined when his older sister begged him to fly home to visit on her favorite holiday, Thanksgiving. Finally, he shared that he had hated their family Thanksgiving celebrations as a child, traditional affairs that included heavy food and a couple of dozen relatives he rarely saw.

You might get negative feedback for not observing family traditions. But making conscious choices could also give you a relationship boost. Drew's sister confessed that she had always disliked the forced cheer of family Thanksgivings, too. Drew started spending the day hiking instead, enjoying his hobby of photography. Next year, his sister is thinking of flying down to join him.

Pick a holiday that is coming up soon. In the space below, write down every activity you usually do at this time.

17

—

1

Look at your list of activities.
Draw a line through any you do not enjoy.

Just think about yourself for now, even if you have a spouse or partner, children and other family members. You can do this exercise with them later or even have them do it if they are old enough to practice being mindful about holiday activities.

Now, look at the activities that are still on your list.
Which do you enjoy most? Mark those with a “1.”

Look at the activities you have left. Which ones do you enjoy, but did not mark with a “1”? The activities marked “1” are your main holiday activities and traditions. The others are less important – you might choose to do them in some years, but not every year.

Sample holiday activity list – New Year's traditions

Things we do

- ✗ Stay up and watch the ball drop in Times Square
- ✗ Have all the neighbors over
- ✓ Drink a glass of champagne
- ✓ Make black-eyed peas and collard greens on New Year's Day
- ✓ Write a list of resolutions

My "1" activities

- ✓ Making black-eyed peas and collard greens on New Year's Day
- ✓ Drink a glass of champagne

My "other" activities

- ✓ Writing a list of resolutions

For a more mindful New Year's celebration, you might cook the traditional January 1 meal but forego the big block party. In 2020, large gatherings are not recommended, so this may be the perfect year to make some changes. You have an excellent reason not to get all those people together.

You may even want to swap your list of resolutions for writing down three successes (to celebrate) and one mistake or failure (to learn from). This idea comes from the book [*Tools of Titans*](#) by Tim Ferris.

Describe your ideal holiday.

The list exercise is not for everyone, so here is a tool to imagine how you would really like to celebrate.

First, pick a holiday. Kwanza, Christmas, Hanukkah, Winter Solstice, Diwali – any holiday you actually enjoy. Sit in a quiet place and write by hand, or type into your keyboard or dictate to your smartphone, what you imagine the ideal way to spend it would be. Read Drew's story for inspiration, and use your description of the ideal holiday to make some changes to your traditions.

Describe your **ideal holiday**.

Here are three more activities, proven to change your brain, that can bring joy even when the holidays are challenging. Try one or more of these alone or with someone else.



Giving

Numerous studies now show that the act of giving to others can boost your mood. There are many ways to give! You can give time and attention to a friend, neighbor, or family member. You can give the gift of physical help by offering to rake a neighbor's leaves or shovel snow.

You can give by sharing something you enjoy, as my neighbor did with me by sharing her gardening tips and inspiring me to plant bulbs. And of course, you can share goods and money. Making an online gift to a favorite charity or donating household items you don't need can enrich other lives while making you feel wonderful, too.



Gratitude

A Vietnamese proverb says, "When you eat fruit, remember the person who planted the tree." What are you grateful for in your daily life? Those of us who live with or who are military service members know how much a deployment can increase gratitude for simple things that civilians take for granted: the chance to shower every day, a soft bed, or a home-cooked meal.

Listen to my thoughts on gratitude and giving on "My Life During the Quarantine." Visit www.gratefulness.org for hundreds of ideas to help you feel more appreciative and joyful.



Music

Many holiday traditions include music. From carolers going door to door at Christmas to the music and dance performances of Diwali, holiday music can spark memories and change your mood.

Many free apps are available to help you stream music or create a personal playlist. You can share music with friends and relatives or get the whole family involved in creating a “Holiday 2020” soundtrack. If you are struggling with depression, anxiety, or illness, you may want to find a [music therapist](#) to harness the power of music to help you heal.



Movement

Music and [exercise](#) are the only activities we know of that get both sides of your brain working at the same time. This is a powerful mood changer! The endorphins released during exercise can help you feel more joyful. Weather permitting, put on some running or walking shoes and get outside, maybe with a pet or a human exercise partner.

If the weather outside is frightful, use your personal soundtrack to hold a holiday dance party. Check out this video of a [delivery driver](#) who used both music and movement to create joy.

LET'S CREATE
A HAPPY
HOLIDAY!