



The multitasking season is here: Your survival guide

The holidays are framed as a time to shift our focus away from work and towards ourselves and our families. Often, the hustle and bustle of the holiday season creates stress in the calmest of people. Again, we will be provided with a host of options and choices as to how we will spend our time and how we will spend our money.

For most of us, work does not stop just because something called the *holidays* have started. This means that we are faced with a myth and expectation about a time to relax and celebrate, at the same time as dealing with a workload that doesn't decrease and may even increase during this time.

Our answer to this doubling up of demands at work and home is *multitasking* — something we have come to understand as a valuable and virtuous skill in today's fast-paced workforce. Something like online shopping for gifts in one window and answering emails in another may seem like a harmless and productive use of time but is it really? Research suggests that multitasking actually is not as efficient as we once thought and can actually hinder our focus and slow down work. Multitasking often means you are distracted and are not able to give appropriate attention to each task.

As the holidays are a time when demands are coming from all angles —work and social— here are some alternatives to multitasking and some tips to help make what can be a stressful time of the year more enjoyable and manageable.

- **Prioritize daily tasks.** Instead of trying to do it all at once, or just looking at your workload as an undifferentiated mass (which can be panic inducing!), break up your work into tasks and prioritize them. A simple way to prioritize is to group tasks into what you *must do*, what you *should do*, what you would *like to do* and start at the top.
- **Take breaks.** Part of why multitasking is tempting is that focusing on one thing for too long can be taxing. Take regular short breaks but stay on the task you set for yourself until it is done, then move on to the next.

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- **Multitask where appropriate.** Multitasking can work for certain things; if one task requires only motor skills and the other uses your mind, it is possible to do both at the same time. This is what allows you to fold laundry while talking on the phone or clean the bathroom while listening to an audiobook.
- **Resist distractions.** Checking your email, your phone and social media are all tempting when you are working but doing so disrupts your focus. Check in once an hour rather than being connected at all times to improve your focus.
- **Take a few days off.** Taking time for yourself is most important especially as the year wraps up. Enjoying some of the statutory holidays around Christmas and New Year's might help you pause and reflect on your home life. At the same time, going into work when most of your colleagues are off can be an amazing way to get some work done in rare solitude.
- **Keep your work at work and home at home.** During the holiday season, your home life demands will probably be intensified. Now more than ever is a time to make sure you don't bring your work home. By the same token, when you are at work, focus on work and not on recipes or gift-buying lists.
- **Don't over commit.** Probably you will receive a lot of invitations this time of year. Say yes only to the ones you really want or need to attend and don't be afraid to say no to others. You can't be everywhere, so avoid spreading yourself too thin and saying yes to everything.

Implementing these tips will help you avoid some of the pitfalls that lead to an overly stressful holiday season and actually allow you to enjoy yourself. Remember to take care of yourself during this time that way you will be more available to your family and to your workplace.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or lonely this holiday season, let us help. Your EFAP can provide you with immediate, confidential expert support at no cost to you, anytime, anywhere.

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Creating new family traditions

Although they are meant to be the “most wonderful time of the year”, the holidays can be a stressful time, sometimes made worse by all the pressure and expectation to have fun and for everyone to get along. Often, we feel pressured by family traditions to do things a certain way. This could mean that we are just going through the motions, traditions, and rituals which could feel like chores rather than expressions of joy and energy. Creating new traditions with your family — or even with your friends — can be a powerful way to reclaim a connection to yourself and your loved ones.

As family dynamics change – perhaps there is a divorce, death of a loved one or families are blended into new, beautiful yet challenging constellations. As time passes, old traditions may not seem suitable for you and your family, and/or what values you want to foster in your children.

What is a tradition?

A tradition or ritual is an action or series of actions that you perform more than once, often at a specific time of the day or of the year. Traditions are often associated with religion, as every religion has traditions in some form, as part of its practice. But not all traditions are religious: blowing out candles on a birthday cake, eating turkey on thanksgiving and going to watch fireworks on Canada Day are all examples of secular traditions.

Why are traditions important?

Traditions have a lot of positive effects on families and social groups. Here are some wonderful benefits of traditions:

- Connect generations and strengthen bonds within a family
- Foster a sense of identity, especially when they are unique
- Provide security, comfort during times of change, upheaval and grief
- Can teach important values
- Create memories
- Add rhythm to the year or week

How to create traditions

Creating traditions is something you can do with your family, so everyone feels connected to the practice itself. Here's how to get started this holiday season:

- First, identify what you already do that counts as a tradition.
- Then ask, “is this tradition serving me and my family?” “Does it need to change or be replaced with something that suits us better, or do we like it as it is?”
- Then, come up with something new. Perhaps you want to light candles if you didn't before. Maybe you want to meditate together. Write a song or a poem. Maybe your new tradition is culinary, is there a new food item that is more connected to your family now than what you ate growing up? Whatever it is, creating something new with your loved ones is a wonderful bonding activity.

Incorporate traditions year round

While you may start making new traditions this holiday season, consider bringing traditions into all parts of the year, some can be daily, others weekly, and others can only happen once or twice annually. Have fun with it, that's the best part of creating traditions yourself: you and your family can truly enjoy them!

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