Concern

Healthy & Resilient **You**



When Did **Holiday Joy** Become a **Performance?**

How a little less perfection leads to a lot more enjoyment.

According to a 2025 Marist poll, half of Americans find the holidays more stressful than fun.

There's the perfect gift to find, the festive meal to prepare, the decorations to put up, and the family traditions to keep alive. We want to make wonderful memories, bring people together, and wrap them all in pumpkin-spiced happiness.

Throughout all that planning and perfecting, finding moments for our own enjoyment feels like the thing on our to-do list that most often gets skipped.

That got us wondering: When the season is meant to be joyful by nature, why do we have to work so hard to get to the happy part?

The Holiday in Our Heads

Most of us have an idea of what the holidays should look like. Maybe it comes from childhood memories, family traditions, or those picture-perfect celebrations we see in the media.

In addition to the gifts and feast and decorations, we need to make sure everyone gets along. That's a lot for us to ask of ourselves. And somehow, we're supposed to pull it all off while feeling consistently cheerful and full of holiday spirit.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to make things special. The trouble begins when the holiday we're trying to create comes out less *Hallmark* and more *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation.*

Good Enough Isn't Settling

Sometimes our most treasured moments are messy, unpredictable, and imperfect. And that's what a *good enough* holiday is all about: enjoying what matters without needing everything to be just right.

Take a minute to think about your best holiday memories. Chances are, not all of them involve perfectly wrapped gifts or beautifully set tables. Maybe it's a conversation that lasted late into the night, a favorite family story, or the year something went so wrong that everyone still laughs about it.

Planning a good enough holiday doesn't mean caring less or giving up on the things we love. It's about putting more of our energy into the experiences that matter and less into making everything look like it was set up for a Martha Stewart holiday special.

Making Room for a Good Enough Holiday

Unlike Martha, you likely don't have a huge production crew—or unlimited budget. So why not give yourself some grace and plan a less stressful holiday?

Start with the feeling, not the festivities – Before deciding what you need to do this season, consider how you'd like it to feel. Connected? Peaceful? Playful? Maybe you just want a little more time to enjoy the people around you. Pick one feeling that matters to you and think about what might help create it. You may discover that a simple activity delivers more of what you're looking for than an elaborate celebration.

Keep the part you love and rethink the rest – Traditions can bring comfort and connection, but sometimes the work of keeping them going becomes bigger than the experience itself. Think about a big holiday gathering and the traditions that go into it: making Grandma's famous stuffing, taking the annual family photo, or letting the youngest guest help hand out the gifts. Which one matters most to you? Consider how you can keep that part alive while letting some of the less important traditions—and related work—go.

Let some things be delightfully imperfect – Not everything needs your best effort. Really. Serve the store-bought pie. Leave the decorations a little uneven. Let the cookies look like they were decorated by someone wearing mittens. Then resist the urge to fix it or apologize. You might find that nobody minds nearly as much as you expected. You might even enjoy yourself more.

Notice the moments you didn't plan – We can plan the menu, the gifts, and the activities. We can't plan exactly how everyone will feel or how every moment will unfold. But we can pay attention when something good happens along the way. Maybe it's an unexpected laugh, a quiet conversation, or a little time together that wasn't on anyone's schedule. When those moments come along, give yourself a chance to enjoy them before moving on to the next task. Sometimes the best part of a celebration is the part nobody tried to organize.

A Holiday Worth Experiencing

Of course, not every holiday will be easy. Money worries, family tensions, grief, and other challenges don't disappear just because we change our expectations. And even the most carefully planned celebration can bring a mix of emotions. But maybe we can take a little pressure off ourselves by remembering that the goal isn't to create a holiday where everything goes right. It's to make room for the things that make the season worthwhile, whatever that looks like for us.

Because a holiday doesn't have to be perfect to be happy.

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