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## Opinion December 2014

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### EDITORIAL: ELIMINATING HOLIDAY STRESS BEFORE IT ARRIVES

By Katherine Austin

Banish the battle of baking, entertaining, gift-giving, and getting-it-all-done with San Diego's secret stress-relieving (and anti-aging) workout regimen.

Have you started baking? Buying? Wrapping?

The holiday season is upon us, with all its expected stresses, but that doesn't mean you have to succumb to the pressures. You can get ahead of the stress curve by building in little pockets of steadiness with breathing techniques, yoga postures and meditations, requiring no more than a few minutes throughout the day.

The holidays can bring out old family patterns, bitter quarrels and resentments over who does too much (and who doesn't do enough). Research from the American Psychological Association shows that balancing your holiday obligations with personal time devoted to quick restorative practices can eliminate anxiety and depression.

Try these simple self-care techniques and see how protect your sanity.

1. Aromatherapy: Buy a diffuser and organic oils from local natural food stores or online and or buy essential oils such as lavender, which has calming effects.
2. Take a bath: Add Epsom salts and lavender essential oil to your bath and relax. At the end of the day, late at night after you've put the turkey in the oven, or whenever you can find yourself a little alone time — make the most of it!
3. Play a song: Whenever and wherever you can, play healing music in the background — from your iPhone, on your Sonos system, or on the radio. Think home, car, office — everywhere you find yourself! Music can shift the energy from stressed and anxious to it's-all-good. My favorite: spiritual music and music for meditation (easy to find online at iTunes or spiritvoyage.com).
4. Shut down: Completely. Two hours before bed time, turn off all electronics — and don't give in to the temptation to turn them back on! A recent New York Times article about Arianna Huffington and Kobe Bryant extolled the virtues of turning everything off and escaping the always-on world we live in.
5. Go to bed: Early. No later than 10 p.m. if you can do it. The energizing hours are in the early morning and you won't greet them if you're up all night.
6. Breathe: In yoga, we focus on the breath to get us through hard poses. We need to do so in life, too. Try left nostril breathing or meditation for stress relief (see instructions below).
7. Strike a pose: Do a few quick yoga poses — legs up the wall with a lavender eye pillow for calming your nervous system; modified downward dog in the kitchen by leaning on the counter; an overhead side stretch one arm at a time. (See spinal flex instructions below.)

A Mayo Clinic study reveals that any form of exercise — anything from a 7-mile run to three minutes of calming yoga poses or deep breathing — can relieve stress. Endorphins are generated by a walk in nature, an impromptu hike, or a few minutes in meditation. Any physical activity helps you release the stress and worries of all your obligations, clearing your mind and resetting it with optimism rather than panic. Don't fall into the trap of not having enough time for yourself this holiday season.

Spinal flex: Sit in a comfortable position in a chair or on the floor, hands on thighs or shins. Inhale, draw chest forward, exhale, round the spine. Do this with eyes closed for three minutes.

Left nostril breathing: The benefits of left nostril breathing are numerous, including sharper, clearer focus of the mind, and a deep, full relaxation or sleep. Yogi Bhanjan taught that if a person breathes through the left nostril for 31 minutes a day for 90 days, they will naturally change their metabolism in favor of relaxation and weight loss. Try doing three minutes a day to start.

Meditation for stress relief and clearing past emotions (this balances hemispheres of the brain): Fingertips touch, palms apart in front of heart, gaze down tip of nose, inhale five seconds, hold for five seconds, exhale five seconds and repeat for three to 11 minutes.

—Katherine Austin owns Karma Yoga San Diego at 1901 Fourth Ave. in the Bankers Hill neighborhood. Learn more at [karma-yoga.net](http://karma-yoga.net) or 619-269-1769.



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