

“Help! I have too much to do!”

It's the most wonderful—and busiest—time of year. Here, experts share super-simple ways to outsmart the overwhelm of the season

Feel feelings

'Sound out' your stress

It's impossible to problem-solve without first acknowledging your stress. “Pause and take a deep breath, breathing longer on the exhale to trigger the *vagus nerve*,” advises clinical psychologist Diana Hill, PhD, explaining that this activates your relaxation response. “When you sigh, you can even make a sound (like *ughhh*), as this has also been shown to induce relaxation.” The next step is to put your feelings into words, like “I don't know where to start,” or “I feel like everything has to be perfect.” By acknowledging and accepting your specific emotions, you create the space to begin to address them.



Pinpoint priorities

Once your mental energy is refreshed, think about what you cherish about the season, says psychotherapist Risa Williams.

“Is it enjoyable being in the moment with friends? Getting into the holiday spirit with certain activities? This makes it easy to jot down a list in order of your values and let go of the tasks that deplete you.” She suggests focusing on three to five tasks that are in keeping with your goals. “Keep your weekly to-do list short and simple, and you won't feel as overwhelmed.”

Avoid these two words

When Williams works with stressed-out women, they often say they just need to “push through” their schedule and

get things done. “When you're telling yourself this, it's a cue that you need to take a break,” she says. Instead of checking off everything on your list, “ask yourself

if you can find an easier task that matches your energy level at the moment. When you slow down on purpose, you actually get a lot more done.”



Find solutions

Picture a jar of rocks

When prioritizing to-do's, experts often advise visualizing a jar, and filling it with big rocks to represent your most important tasks, then filling the remaining space with sand to symbolize less vital to-do's. But Hill says we should get rid of the sand entirely. “Leave space in the jar—in your schedule—for rest.” That could mean penciling in time to gaze at holiday lights. “We need space in the ‘margins’ to enjoy life.”

Consider a 'sticky wall'

To breeze through tasks, productivity coach Ellen Faye suggests “Post-it planning.” “Jot down each task on a note, then place them on a wall. The wall makes it easy to move the notes

in the order you want to get them done—suddenly, it's easy to know where to start.” She adds that when you're finished with a task, physically ripping the note off the wall gives you a sense of accomplishment that motivates you.

Let yourself ask for help

“The silent ‘time sucks’ of organizing family events often fall on women, especially over the holidays, and they're called ‘kin work,’” says Faye. To spread out these labors of love, she advises jotting down tasks—from doing the dishes to setting the holiday table—on notes, which relatives can easily pick from. This way, the pressure isn't on you to delegate. “When everyone has something to do, *you* can focus on enjoying the holiday season.”

Our expert panel



Diana Hill, PhD, is a clinical psychologist, international trainer and sought-out speaker on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) More at DrDianaHill.com.



Risa Williams, author of *The Ultimate Time Management Toolkit*, is a time-management consultant. Check out her podcast, *The Motivation Mindset*. More at RisaWilliams.com.



Ellen Faye, author of *Productivity for How You're Wired*, is a Productivity Leadership Coach who has had a thriving company since 2001. Visit EllenFaye.com.