

# REDBOOK

**WANT MORE ENERGY?**

stop yawning and read this, p.150

**your total guide to hassle-free holidays!**

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**how NOT to overeat, overspend, or overdo**

the hidden ways he says  
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**Rachael Ray**

her favorite holiday recipes + traditions—  
and why she'll never make gingerbread again

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see p.16

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## HOW NOT TO OVERDO THE HOLIDAYS

7 stay-sane strategies.

### HOW NOT TO OVERFANTASIZE

Forget the sugarplum fairies already. No one's holiday is a storybook affair with a Stepford family that roams the neighborhood humming carols and a Martha Stewart spread featuring enough homemade trimmings to impress, well, Ms. Stewart herself. Perhaps you latched on to your fantasies because they're just like, or better than, the holidays you had growing up, says life coach Sherri Ziff Lester of RockYourLife Coaching.com. But as a kid, you were oblivious to Mom's stress migraine, Dad's hernia from stringing holiday lights, and their shared credit-card hangover. So before you go chasing that elusive "best Christmas ever," give yourself a reality check. Define what a meaningful holiday looks like for you in your life *now*. Set realistic goals, like spending one night a week celebrating with your family, or hosting a dessert party instead of a five-course feast, then protect those plans and make them happen. If hand-beading every ornament on your 10-foot tree will truly *make* the holidays for you, do it. And if not, skip it without breaking your yuletide stride.

### HOW NOT TO OVERCOMMIT

Before accepting any invitations to make merry with friends, neighbors, or coworkers, mark your calendar with blocks of time to spend with your family, advises Lisa Lelas, coauthor of *Simple Steps for Every Holiday: An Easy Plan for More Joyful, Less Stressful Celebrations All Year Long*. With those dates reserved, you can send out your holiday S.O.S. ("Sure!" "Of course!" "See you there!"). Here, some other rules of thumb.

- **Limit social events to one or two per weekend.** Spend your valuable time at the parties you'll most enjoy. If you have no energy to attend yet another tree trimming, say no kindly but firmly. If your friend's cowboy-themed "Ho-Ho-Ho-down" is the same night as your sister's annual bash, you *can* make quickie stops at both, but be up front with each host ahead of time. Their parties aren't about you, reminds Lelas, so once you're there, focus on that party—and stifle the elaborate excuses about why you can't stay.
- **When you're playing hostess, say yes to help.** You invite 35 of your closest friends to your house to sip eggnog and at least 30 of them ask, "What can I bring?" Repeat after us: "Thank you for offering, how about \_\_\_\_\_?" Single out 10 or so items you need—napkins, cookies, punch—and let guests choose what's easiest for them.

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## wish a way to really connect with your family this year

First step: Don't just expect family magic to happen—create it! Decide which value or activity (charity, reading, cooking, or just togetherness) you want to build around, says Meg Cox, author of *The Book of New Family Traditions*. Then, evaluate what you're already doing (going to midnight Mass, playing dreidel) and possibly expand on it. Here are some of Cox's favorite ideas for new traditions.

**Adore your tree.** Turn off the room's lights and sit for an hour together in the twinkle, drinking cocoa and telling stories about the oldest ornaments or past holidays.

**Light a solstice bonfire.** On December 21, tie ribbons on either end of some twigs; one end represents the bad from 2006, the other side represents your new-year wishes. Break the sticks and throw the bad side into your fireplace or outdoor fire. Keep the good side to remind you that 2007 is a fresh start. (Skip this tradition if you have curious toddlers!)

**Make a literary Advent calendar.** Wrap up all of your kids' favorite holiday picture books and every night, let them unwrap one to read together before bedtime.

**Give Hanukkah gifts every other night.** Instead of eight presents, give four and fill the other nights with family fun, such as going bowling or ice-skating. Let your kids pick the activities for two nights.

last-minute gifts that arrive on time

Check out Yahoo! Shopping's Holiday Gift Center (shopping.yahoo.com), which suggests gifts (until December 23!) that are guaranteed to arrive by December 24.



## wish a meaningful holiday card message



Whether you're making your own cards or penning greetings into blank store-bought ones, start by sifting through the holiday cards you received last year for heartstring-tugging inspiration, says Kate Saliba, co-owner of Smudge Ink (smudgeink.com), a letterpress card and stationery company. Be warm, celebratory, and succinct with a message such as, "Wishing you peace, joy, and laughter in 2007." And whenever possible, add a personal touch such as, "Hope Molly's loving kindergarten!"