

# Christmas

## the month-long holiday

*By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.* — Benjamin Franklin

Much has changed in my outlook on this holiday over the last several years. Here are some realizations I have come to as the Christmas seasons have passed.

**I won't remember ...** who did or didn't send me a Christmas card (that they probably spent better than half a day filling out, addressing and mailing) ... and they probably won't remember if I sent them one either \* if someone gave me a gift or not \* what I ate for Christmas dinner \* whether I got all of my decorations up \* the parties I did or didn't go to \* the hours I waited in line to buy mass-produced stuff so I'd have a gift to hand someone on Christmas Day

**I will remember ...** the excitement my kiddos had when we went on a Santa Train ride in a real, old-fashioned, restored locomotive \* the holiday crafts we almost finished \* having breakfast with Santa at Chick-Fil-A \* going to our city's Christmas parade and downtown walkabout \* taking the kiddos with me to donate toys to needy kids \* riding around in our van in our PJs, drinking hot cocoa and looking at some of the best Christmas light displays ever \* my kids getting to have fun with me because I am healthy, happy and not stressed



Are you wondering how you can get to this place? Here's a list of things you can do right now to begin creating a healthier and happier you this Christmas.

- Write down your weight loss goal for the month and post it somewhere you'll see it daily. Goals are what help us win and push on. Make your goal realistic. Focus on maintaining your weight or just losing a few pounds for the month. Setting realistic, achievable goals will help you get to the end goal more easily. Setting unrealistic goals just frustrates you and can be counterproductive. It's better to maintain and not gain any weight than to shoot for a 5-pound loss, get upset halfway through the month and binge, then gain 2 pounds. Be kind to yourself and enjoy the month responsibly.
- Find all the activities that make you say "Hell, yes!" and put just those on the calendar this year.
- Cut back on who you buy for this holiday season. Use the time you would have spent running around buying stuff all month long to take care of yourself and do the things you really want to do.

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- ❑ Put your workouts on the calendar. If anything comes up that interferes with them, just politely say, “I can’t make it to the Christmas \_\_\_\_\_. I have a previous engagement.” Don’t say anything else; don’t explain what the previous engagement is. You taking care of you is heads and tails more important than another activity.
- ❑ Don’t make baked goods. If you usually help out with a fundraiser by making baked goods, offer to do another activity to help out.
- ❑ Instead of running around buying gifts that family may or many not want, wasting all of your precious time and money, make a photo book. Design a photo book of the kiddos for the entire family and make multiple copies to give away as gifts. This gives the grandparents something to show off to their friends, saves you time that you can spend at the gym or doing a “Hell, yes!” activity, and keeps you out of the mall and away from the food court. It’s a win-win!
- ❑ If you want to give food items as gifts, or if it’s a family tradition, make ingredient jars for hot cocoa, tea, brownies, cookies, sweet breads, etc. The recipients can make them whenever they want, so they don’t have to eat them right then. They could wait and enjoy the gift all year. The benefit for you is that it will keep you from mindlessly munching on cookies that “accidentally” fell on the counter or weren’t cute enough to give away. (Try these recipes for [drink mixes](#) and [baked good mixes](#).)
- ❑ Beat your well-meaning family to the chase. If you get roped into some activity or event every year by your overzealous sister, mother or mother-in-law, cut her off at the pass. Politely say that you won’t be joining in on this year’s 12-hour Christmas shopping mall excursion. Don’t offer up a reason; just say you won’t be able to come. You’re allowed to say no without giving a reason. By taking control of the situation, you take back control of your time.
- ❑ Have healthy casseroles or meals (five to eight for the month is a good number) prepped and in your freezer for days when your activities run over. Knowing all you have to do is heat something up when you get home is a relaxing feeling—and saves you from ordering pizza yet again to feed the family.
- ❑ Make a breakfast casserole on Christmas Eve so it can cook while you’re opening gifts Christmas morning. If you start Christmas Day off right with a good breakfast, you’ll know how many calories or points you have left for Christmas dinner. Plus, you won’t miss out on time with the kiddos by being in the kitchen instead of by the tree with them. (Try these recipes for a [ham and cheese casserole](#), [sausage casserole](#), French toast topped with [bananas Foster](#) or [crème brulee French toast](#).)

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- Food is not scarce. When I finally had the light bulb go off and realized I'm surrounded by food constantly, it helped me see that I would rather use my calories and points for what I *really* want and not just settle for what is there right at that moment.
- Eat a small meal before you go to a Christmas party. This will keep you away from all the finger foods.
- Check out the whole buffet. Find the foods you really want and focus on them.
- If you love sweets, avoid desserts at parties until close to the time you want to leave. Once we eat something sweet, it's hard to resist the urge to go back for more. If you're about to leave, that helps with this problem.
- Like Thanksgiving, try to have dinner at someone else's house and bring your side dishes.
- Instead of having a huge Christmas dinner at your house, have the extended family over on Christmas Eve for cocoa and cookies, then just have an on-plan meal for Christmas dinner.
- Bake your cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve. I used to bake all month long. Baking cookies early translates into more time to eat the cookies. The kids each made a big cookie for Santa last year on Christmas Eve, and it worked like a charm. Santa didn't gain any weight that December.
- Weigh yourself regularly. I used to put up my scale after Halloween and not bring it out until January 1. Focus on maintaining your weight when you have several social obligations that include food. It's better to stay where you are than to give up all that you have done thus far. Taking a few weeks off from losing and instead focusing on maintaining is a great way to practice for when you hit your goal!
- Avoid the eggnog. It's everywhere, and I love it, too, but it's a huge drain on your calories or points. If you know you have a weakness for eggnog and it just won't feel like the holidays without it, then avoid having it at social gatherings and make a healthier version at home. (Try these recipes for a [Weight Watchers](#) version and a [low-fat](#) version.)
- Learn how to flex your assertiveness muscles. If anything, most of us have been conditioned to not set boundaries in order to avoid negative reactions from others. The ability to set boundaries to take care of yourself begins with the belief that your self is worth caring for. If we've learned that taking care of ourselves results in conflict, rejection or abandonment, it's likely that we'll shut down when we need to set a boundary, rather than take that risk. It's all about learning the right way to say no. After I began saying no to others, I realized it's not as bad as I thought. People were very understanding and didn't put up any resistance.

# 7 Simple Ways to Say No

Here are seven ways for you to say no. Use the method that best meets your needs in the situation.

## 1 “I can’t commit to this as I have other priorities at the moment.”

This lets the person know your plate is full at the moment, so he or she should hold off on this as well as future requests. If it makes it easier, you can also share what you’re working on so the person can understand better. I use this when I have too many commitments to attend to.

## 2 “Now’s not a good time as I’m in the middle of something. How about we reconnect at X time?”

It’s common to get sudden requests for help when you’re in the middle of something. Sometimes I get phone calls from friends or associates when I’m in a meeting or doing important work. This method is a great way to (temporarily) hold off the request. First, you let the person know it’s not a good time as you’re doing something. Second, you make known your desire to help by suggesting another time (at your convenience). This way, the person doesn’t feel blown off.

## 3 “I’d love to do this, but...”

I often use this as it’s a gentle way of saying no to the other party. It’s encouraging because it lets the other person know you like the idea. (Of course, only say this if you do like it.) I often get collaboration proposals from fellow bloggers and business associates that I can’t participate in, and I use this method to gently say no. Their ideas are absolutely great, but I can’t take part due to prior commitments or different needs.

## 4 “Let me think about it first and I’ll get back to you.”

This is more like a *maybe* than a straight-out *no*. If you’re interested but you don’t want to say yes just yet, use this. Sometimes I’m pitched a great idea that meets my needs but I want to hold off on committing until I think about it first. There are times when new considerations pop in and I want to be certain of the decision before committing myself. If the person is sincere about the request, he or she will be more than happy to wait a short while. Specify a date or time range when the person can expect a reply (for example, within one to two weeks).

## 5 “This doesn’t meet my needs now, but I’ll be sure to keep you in mind.”

If someone is pitching a deal or opportunity that isn’t what you’re looking for, let him or her know straight out that it doesn’t meet your needs. Otherwise, the discussion can drag on longer than it should. It lets the person know there’s nothing wrong with what he or she is offering; you’re just looking for something else. By saying you’ll keep him or her in mind, it signals you’re open to future opportunities.

## 6 “I’m not the best person to help on this. Why don’t you try X?”

If you can’t contribute much or don’t have the resources to help, let the person know. If possible, refer him or her to another person or department where he or she can seek help. I always make it a point to offer an alternate contact so the person doesn’t end up in a dead end.

## 7 “No, I can’t.”

This is the simplest and most direct way. We build up too many barriers in our mind to saying no. These barriers are self-created; they’re not true at all. Don’t think so much about saying no; just say it outright. You’ll be surprised when the reception isn’t half as bad as you imagined it would be.