



STARTING TO FEEL THE STRESS OF THE SILLY SEASON?

Christmas is supposed to be one of the most enjoyable times of the year – but it can also be the most stressful...

Crowds, lack of car parks, queues at the check-out, and the rising cost of gifts is enough to cause many shoppers to turn as red as Father Christmas' suit. Not to mention the barrage of invites to Christmas dinners, work drinks, lunches... all of which take time to attend and time to recover from. If you're feeling stressed and exhausted at the thought of it all, then you're not alone, but there are means and ways to survive the silly season.

The best way to avoid the Christmas rush is to hit the shops early. Shopping left until the last minute can often lead to panic buying, which can cause shoppers to overspend. Pour yourself a soothing cuppa and start to jot down your gift ideas. This will not only save you time looking for inspiration, but will curb those impulsive (read: expensive & risky) purchases.

No one likes to turn down an invite, but now is a good time to start setting your boundaries. Beware of booking out too much of your personal time with work functions and drinks. It will only cause you stress and put more pressure on you to do things in the weekend when we all know you should be kicking back and enjoying the arrival of summer with friends and family. Think about how many more hours you will have to stay at work if you join one of your suppliers for a long leisurely lunch. Maybe catching up in the New Year to celebrate your achievements in 2008 isn't such a bad idea if you just can't say no.

The thought of the extended family landing on your doorstep for Christmas lunch/dinner is enough to send the most experienced entertainers into a spin. If you know you're not going to cope, the house will be in a mess, you can't quite get your head around feeding 16 people (including a gluten-free vegetarian) and you know the first thing your mother-in-law will notice is the mould in the shower, then consider employing someone to help! Asking for help seems to go against the grain for many women (and it is usually the women who 'do' Christmas in the majority of households) but the reality is that our lives are busier and more demanding than ever. If paying someone \$50 an hour to lend you a hand means you're going to be less stressed on Christmas Day, then grab your wallet!

And if all else fails, remember that great family moments have little to do with the gifts and a perfectly cooked turkey. Play with the kids, eat that third serving of Christmas pudding, enjoy Grandad's stories and quality time with your loved ones! (CHARLIE PERRY)