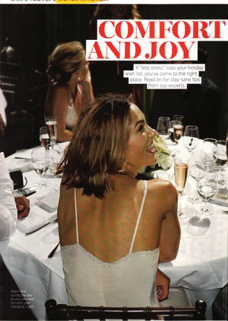




SHAPE YOUR LIFE **WOMEN IN ACTION**

COMFORT AND JOY

If "less stress" took your holiday wish list, you've come to the right place. Read on for stay-sane tips from our experts.



TO DO

To host a dinner party without breaking a sweat

So, you invited your neighbors and family for a Thanksgiving feast? Great idea—in theory. Now you have to actually pull it off. Don't panic! Even smart hostesses can get a few corners, and no one will be the wiser as long as you do it right.

First, create an easy-to-prepare menu. **Call down the number of dishes you'll serve like tabs of coffee, for instance, instead of bread,** and include some make-ahead options, such as a chilled beef salad or stuffed mushrooms, so that you can focus on the turkey. It's also important to realize you don't have to cook everything yourself. Buy pre-cut crudites, olives, and spiced nuts for appetizers, if your favorite restaurant makes amazing roasted Brussels sprouts, go ahead and order some. And when guests offer to bring something, take them up on it.

Create a festive ambience by lighting unscented candles and assembling a simple centerpiece with seasonal materials like cranberries and pinecones. Cut up some music that's energetic but not overwhelming (Adele's newest album, *25*, is a nice blend of jazz and pop), and stock the bar with wine and beer for guests to serve themselves. Then pour yourself a drink and relax until the doorbell rings.



ENTERTAINING
Lisa LaRocca

TO DO

To spend evenings at holiday soirées—not the office

The time of year when social calendars and demands at the office often compete for your attention. But with a few simple tweaks to your schedule, you'll be able to clock out on time and raise a glass of wine with friends.

For starters, don't sweat the small stuff. Around the holidays, it's okay to let spreadsheet-type tasks slide a little (allow that "to file" pile to grow, or submit expenses biweekly rather than weekly). Then, take control of distractions like phone calls and chats with coworkers. **Since time is of the essence, explain to everyone that you're slammed and, if possible, close your office door.** Turn off the annoying email "ping" on your computer, and check your personal account no more than twice a day.

Lastly, keep your eye on the prize—literally. Hang that party dress nearby as a reminder of why you're putting your nose to the grindstone. Talk about incentives!



LABEL
Lisa LaRocca

TO DO

To truly enjoy hanging out with your loved ones

We can't choose our relatives, but we can decide when to visit them. If family gatherings bring more pain than pleasure, try the drama altogether and make a trip to see them in January or February, when there's less pressure.

If you do decide to brave the season, be sure to manage your expectations. **A lot of the disappointment people feel comes from hoping things will suddenly be perfect just because it's the holidays.** The truth is, most of us revert to old patterns when we hang out with family. By simply remembering that Aunt Sue is sure to ask about your dating status and Dad will inevitably ramble about politics, you'll be better prepared to handle the aggravation.

But don't anticipate the worst, either. Accept loved-ones for who they are and this just may be the year you finally have fun and everyone gets along.



FRIENDS AND FAMILY
Lisa LaRocca



THIS "REEL GIRL" IS READY TO PARTY

Linda Tringali, a 24-year-old from New York City, wants to throw a memorable bash for friends this month without breaking the bank. She's eager to try Anna's strategies and celebrate the season guilt-free.

• Our Best Girls follow our advice each month—and live the results! Visit their adventures at shape.com/women-in-action.