

How perfectionism stole Christmas

Striving to create the ideal holiday can only lead to disappointment

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Perfectionists get upset when they put too much pressure on themselves to have a perfect holiday. (Shutterstock)

The word “perfection” should be changed to “purefiction.”

Though it has a positive connotation, to brag “I’m a perfectionist” is really saying “I’m a well-intentioned person who is willing to inflict relentless torturous pain upon myself, in an effort to achieve unrealistic goals.”

The word “holidays” also has a positive connotation, but when mixed with the p-word, you don’t get holiday stress. This only leads to disappointment, turning Christmas into a Christmiss and a Christmish.

“Perfectionists and non-perfectionists put too much pressure on themselves to have the ideal holiday, which is exhausting and very upsetting when things end up not being perfect,” says Dr. Gordon Flett, a professor at York University and holder of a Canada Research chair in personality and health.

“A key thing for perfectionists is to get some rest over the holidays so they can re-charge.”

Yet with the whirl of the holiday season, it’s even more difficult to tackle perfectionism now.

“There’s a reason why we make New Year’s resolutions and not December 15th resolutions,” notes Dr. D. Richard Stober, a psychology professor at Ryerson University and author of *When Perfect Isn’t Good Enough*.

“You must give yourself permission to make mistakes. Recognize that no matter what happens during January 1st it won’t matter much,” says Antony. “By allowing some flexibility in the way you do things, you’ll be more comfortable with minor imperfections and unexpected changes to your plans.”

Perfectionism isn’t just setting high standards, Antony says. There’s a difference.

“Most people adjust their standards if they realize they’re set too high,” he says. “Perfectionists are t

Consequently, perfectionists often experience intense anxiety, shame, anger, or low moods when the

Flett says recent research has linked perfectionism to early mortality, and he wonders if it even playe

Flett remarks on another study that shows children who are perfectionists are prone to pathological

Help is available, Flett says, and there’s no shame in seeking it. “Many perfectionists are unwilling to

Interestingly, Antony finds, “It’s usually other things that bring people in for help, and then you reali

Whatever the case, Flett emphasizes that a key treatment goal is to develop a sense of self-acceptanc

So this holiday season, don’t strive for perfection. Just strive. And remember, it’s perfectly wonderfu

Coping with holiday perfectionism, with some advice from Dr. Martin Antony:

Take a step back: Become aware of your beliefs and behaviours.

Question yourself: Are these beliefs unreasonably stressing you? What would happen if you were to s

Practice makes imperfect: Take risks. Make small mistakes. Hang your bathroom towels crooked. Ev

Don’t procrastinate, delegate: Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Focus on a fun process, not a

Seek professional help: Talk to your doctor. There is help.

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