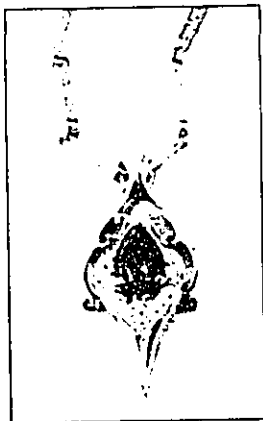
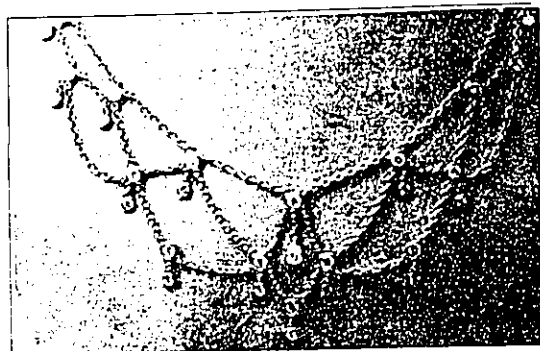


Holiday Traditions



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BLUES, from page 20



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get. Be realistic, include how much you will need to spend on entertaining, travel and incidentals. Then draw up a list of whom you will be giving gifts. Be sure to include everyone, from your parents to the kid who delivers your paper to your co-workers, and establish a limit and stick to it.

Don't be reluctant to ask your friends and family what they want for Christmas. What they want may cost less than what you planned to spend. If one member of the family wants a particularly expensive item — say, Grandmother could use a new television — then get together with other siblings and each contribute to the final price. But be sure to let her choose the set she wants.

Also, by talking to friends, you might find that they, too, are feeling somewhat stressed by holiday spending and would gladly de-escalate the gift-giving to a more reasonable level — say a homemade wreath or an exchange of holiday baked goods.

Of course, the truly sensible ones do all their shopping before the frenzy erupts, but most find themselves at the mall at the last minute. Sometimes this can't be avoided — people do run out of wrapping paper — but resist the urge to make a special trip for that one last present, especially for kids.

They probably already have more than enough under the tree. Spending Christmas Eve waiting in line at a cash register with an impulse buy is a sure way to create stress.

Parties can be troublesome whether you are giving them or just attending. There are always plenty of temptations to both eat and drink, so try to maintain some moderation to avoid recriminations once the halls have been undecked of boughs of holly.

Here are some tips to help you through the holidays:

- Don't go anywhere hungry. Skipping meals in anticipation of holiday feasts only makes you want to eat and drink more.
- Pace yourself. The fastest route to burnout is to become overtired and miss sleep, which will make you susceptible to fatigue and illness.
- Divide the chores. Spreading the wealth of a holiday to-do list can help lessen the load, particularly since so many of the tasks — entertaining, shopping and decorating — are still seen as women's work. Divide the responsibilities, particularly when it comes to child care.
- Be good to yourself. Feeling frazzled? Overwhelmed? Take the time for a long, hot bath or a long lunch with a good friend. And if you see something you'd really like while shopping, get it for yourself.
- Most of all, don't expect perfection. The holidays are for celebration and sharing the season's joy with others, not producing the perfect place-setting or getting each child exactly what he or she wants. By relaxing expectations, you allow yourself to enjoy more.

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