- Health self-care / Holidays

How to make this your best Noche Buena ever

Experience the true spirit of Christmas by prioritizing wellness, embracing simplicity, and valuing your own unique journey

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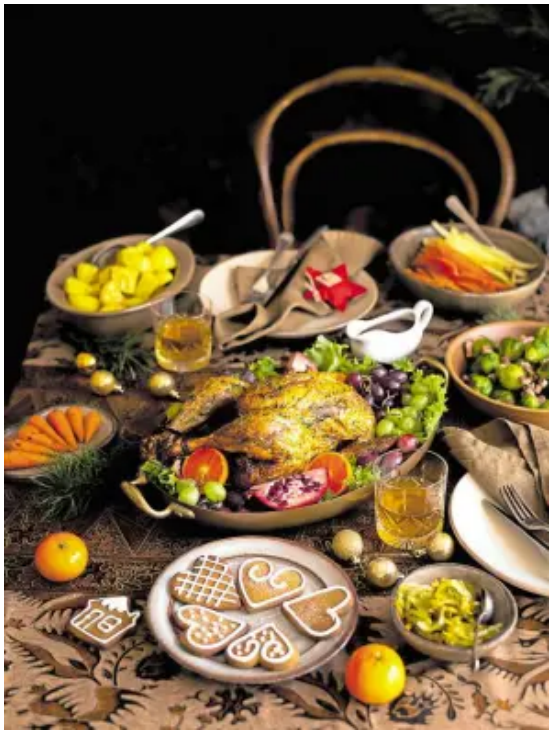
For many, Christmas is the happiest season of the year. But for others, the season can feel heavy, even amid success or abundance. There's stress, comparison, loneliness, or the fear of overindulging. Some feel overwhelmed by last-minute tasks, while others carry emotional weight—from a loved one's health issues to relationship struggles or work pressures—that intensifies during the holidays.



The last week of December may be short, but its impact on our well-being is significant. In fact, a 2023 report from the American Psychological Association shows that nearly 90 percent of adults experience stress during the holiday season, with about 41 percent saying they feel even more stressed than at other times of the year.

Without protecting our energy and approaching life's challenges mindfully, the season's pressure can easily take over our mind and body— and steal the joy we've been anticipating.

Here's how I've learned to rise above the challenges and approach the season with intention, meaning, and joy that protects your mental health and supports your body.

When Christmas brings sadness

If you're grieving, honor your feelings and don't force yourself into traditions that feel painful. Try something different—celebrate in a new space, focus on activities that bring comfort, or keep the gathering smaller this year. Most importantly, lean into connection by spending time with loved ones for support and meaningful moments together.

When comparison keeps you unsatisfied

Instead of comparing yourself to others, focus on your own journey: your blessings, growth, and wins this year. Set goals for the next year based on your progress alone. Celebrate achievements in every way and write your own story. And skip the scrolling. Focus on the joy you've shared with your loved ones. This is your life, your way, your Christmas.

When abundance leads to anxiety

Approach the season with flexibility. Practice mindful indulgence by enjoying holiday food while honoring your body with moderation, and use the opportunity to reconnect thoughtfully, perhaps even healing strained relationships. By embracing this flexible mindset, you regain a sense of control and create deeper, more meaningful connections.

When Noche Buena becomes a stressor

Many of us fall into the same pattern every year—trying to do everything in a single day. Last-minute grocery runs, gift shopping and wrapping, cooking, cleaning, and preparing the house for guests. Here's what usually happens when we try to do it all at once:

1. Cooking, cleaning, shopping, and wrapping gifts—all in 24 hours— disrupt hormones and make you too tired to enjoy food, or even move your body.
2. You feel sluggish and unable to connect with loved ones fully.
3. Late nights and early mornings leave you drained on Christmas Day, making you more susceptible to sickness.

The right Noche Buena game plan 1. Plan ahead

• Pull out your calendar and schedule tasks.
• Start groceries early. Plan your budget, menu, and shop gradually to avoid last-minute stress.
• Finalize gifts, wrap them, and place them under the tree or send them ahead of time.
• Schedule housework: Cleaning, decorating, and tidying can be done in small steps now rather than all at once.

2. Prioritize your well-being

• Aim for seven to eight hours of sleep on Dec. 24, especially if you anticipate staying up late on Christmas Eve.
• Nourish your body throughout the day to support balanced hormones and sustained energy.
• A morning workout helps keep your mind fresh and body strong, ready to face your loved ones with excitement and real presence.

3. Conserve energy on Christmas Eve

Delegate responsibilities and focus on what truly matters. Simplify your menu because the goal is to connect, not stress yourself out. A potluck approach works wonders.

Here's the protein- and fiber-packed, wellness-friendly menu I'm focusing on this year (extra dishes will come from my family):

• One welcome food: Christmas mixed nuts
• Three protein dishes: Baked salmon, chicken and mushroom embotido, and steak
• Two veggie dishes: Greek salad and roasted mixed veggies
• Two healthy carb dishes: Shrimp pesto using whole-grain pasta and shirataki Shanghai rice
• One dessert: Buko pandan with chia seeds using Greek yogurt and less cream