

Editor's notes:

December comes from "decem," Latin for 10, because it was once the tenth month in the Roman calendar. The son of Marcus Antoninus, Emperor Commodus, tried to rename the month Amazonius in honour of his mistress (whose portrait he had painted as an Amazon), but the attempt failed.

If you're already getting stressed out this Christmas season, don't despair. Follow these suggestions from the Mayo Clinic to help reduce stress year round.

- Plan your day. Consider waking up 15 minutes early to avoid feeling rushed. Tackle unpleasant tasks first to get them out of the way.
- Learn to say "no." Try to pace yourself, and delegate responsibility to others whenever appropriate and possible.
- Take a few minutes to relax, stretch, or walk periodically throughout the day.
- Exercise regularly, at least 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Get enough sleep.
- Eat a balanced diet with a variety of foods.
- Give yourself regular breaks from your routine.
- Stay connected with family and friends.

According to a survey in Canada by Coca-Cola, 70 percent of children ages four to eight send their wish list to the North Pole, and more than 80 percent leave milk and cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve. Here are a few more dates to consider this month:

Wright Brothers Day, December 17 -- This day celebrates the first sustained and controlled flight with a heavier-than-air and engine-powered aircraft, conducted by Orville and Wilbur Wright in 1903. The flight -- and three others that day -- took place near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. In 1927, Congress established the Wright Brothers National Memorial to preserve the site.

Christmas Eve, December 24 -- The peak of the holiday season and the inspiration of Clement Moore's beloved poem, "The Night before Christmas." Moore, a professor of theology at Troy, New York, wrote it for his two young daughters in 1822. The following year, a family friend mailed a copy to a local newspaper, and it was soon known around the world.



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Chanukah, December 26 - January 2 -- During this "Festival of Lights," the candles in a menorah are lit on eight successive nights to celebrate the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrians. Miraculously, one day's supply of lamp oil lasted for eight.



New Year's Eve Around the World

At midnight Eastern Standard Time on New Year's Eve, millions of Americans watch the ball drop in New York City's Times Square. Other countries have their own traditions for observing the last night of the year.

In Scotland, the celebration is called Hogmannay, and 100,000 people or more throng the streets of Edinburgh and Glasgow for dancing and revelry.

In Spain, as the clock bells toll midnight, celebrants eat 12 grapes. At each peal of the bells, they put another grape in their mouths. When the clock stops chiming and the grapes are eaten the old year is deemed officially over.

In parts of South America, people make an effigy of a person out of old clothes stuffed with newspapers and firecrackers. At midnight, the dummy is set on fire, symbolizing that the old year is going up in smoke.

Fireworks are the main attraction in Australia, where crowds gather around Sydney Harbour Bridge. Fireworks displays are staged near the Eiffel Tower in Paris; and in London, the fireworks focus is the London Eye, the largest Ferris Wheel (or observation wheel) in the world, built for the Millennium Celebration in 1999.



Merry Christmas

All your friends at Helix Courier Limited wish you the very best for this Christmas and Chanukah season. May you have a wonderful time with friends and family and may we all enjoy continued health, peace and prosperity.

Oh Deer!

*'Twas the night before Christmas and at the North Pole,
the last-minute planning was taking its toll.*

*As Santa was hastily making a scheme
for the placement of deer in his sleigh-pulling team,
the good Mrs. Claus was crocheting bright bows
to be worn by these reindeer -- four bucks and four
does.*

*The bows were coloured in eight festive hues:
ocher, rose, cerise, chartreuse, maroon,
magenta, white, and blue.
These helped Santa keep track of who's who.*

*The deer pulled the toy-laden sleigh in four rows,
arranged so no row held two bucks or two does.
The order of pullers was changed year by year,
for Santa was thoroughly fair with his deer.*

*He summoned the elves and instructed them thus:
"Let's hitch up the reindeer with minimum fuss."
The bow on the buck behind Dasher is white,
while Blitzen, a doe, sees cerise to her right.*

*The blue bow is nearer the sleigh than is Dancer,
but nearer the front of my team than is Prancer.
The doe in chartreuse gets a front-of-team honor,
but not on the same side as Cupid or Donner in blue.*

*Now, Comet stands two spots ahead of the rose.
And three deer of four on the right side are does.
The cerise bow is worn two in back of maroon,
one of which is beside the bright ocher festoon.*

*Vixen is girlish and behind Dancer.
Oh, Cupid in white is in front of a buck, by the way.
That's how they line up for pulling the sleigh.*

Can you figure out where each deer fits in?

Who's a buck? Who's a doe?

Who's Comet? Who's Cupid?

Where are Donner and Blitzen?

Who's Dasher? Who's Dancer?

Where are Vixen and Prancer?

*With logical thought, you'll determine the answer
and write down the colour and place for each deer.*

Answer Key:

*Front row left, Dasher (buck) in magenta
Front row right, Comet (doe) in chartreuse
Second row left, Cupid (buck) in white
Second row right, Dancer (doe) in maroon
Third row left, Donner (buck) in blue
Third row right, Vixen (doe) in rose
Fourth row left, Blitzen (doe) in ocher
Fourth row right, Prancer (buck) in cerise*

The History of Gingerbread

The first known recipe for gingerbread dates back to ancient Rome. By the end of the 11th century, gingerbread had spread throughout western Europe and was considered a special treat at village fairs.

Germany has the oldest tradition of making flat gingerbread in a range of shapes -- people, animals, hearts, or flowers. During the Middle Ages, an unmarried woman supposedly had to eat a gingerbread "husband" at fair before she could find a real one. In the 17th century, Nuremberg became known as the gingerbread capital of the world. It produced the delicacy in very elaborate shapes. By the 19th century, these included "witches' houses," inspired by the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel."

Today, people worldwide enjoy gingerbread as cakes, crisp cookies (or snaps), and dark squares of loaf bread served with lemon sauce or whipped cream.



Merits of Molasses

Don't feel guilty if you yield to your cravings for gingerbread this season because a key ingredient -- molasses-- is actually good for you. Molasses is mineral rich, with high levels of iron, magnesium, calcium, and phosphorus. It's also a good source of vitamin K. For these reasons, molasses makes a healthy replacement for brown sugar in many recipes.

Very Punny

See if you can stand any of these puns without groaning:

- *A man's home is his castle, in a manor speaking.*
- *Dijon vu -- the same mustard as before.*
- *Shotgun wedding: A case of wife or death.*
- *Does the name Pavlov ring a bell?*
- *She was engaged to a man with a wooden leg but broke it off.*
- *You feel stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.*
- *A boiled egg in the morning is hard to beat.*
- *He had a photographic memory that was never developed.*
- *What's the definition of a will? It's a dead giveaway.*
- *Those who get big for their britches will be exposed in the end.*

Can you make up any of your own?