



FINDING

JOY

THIS  
HOLIDAY  
SEASON



The end-of-year hustle and bustle, added to other stresses we may be feeling due to the economy, loneliness, family or financial challenges, and other concerns can diminish the joy we want to experience during this season. Feeling down, when everyone else seems to be bursting with holiday spirit, is isolating and can amplify stress. Whether you are feeling down, or just too busy to embrace the spirit of the season, you can find joy in some simple, yet meaningful ways.

### *Embrace the spirit of giving by giving your time*

Volunteering your time to a cause or charity can bring immense fulfillment and is a great opportunity to remember that no matter our circumstances, there are always people in need that we can help. International Volunteer Day is on December 5th; lending a helping hand to local organizations, nonprofits, schools, hospitals, or churches, can make a world of difference.

### *Rediscover the magic of holiday music*

Immerse yourself in the nostalgia and joy of holiday music. As you decorate your home or go about your daily chores, let the familiar melodies transport you back to cherished childhood memories.

### *Start a new holiday tradition*

Sometimes keeping old traditions that don't have meaning for you detract from your holiday spirit. Instead, give yourself permission to skip traditions that don't add to your festivity, and instead create a new holiday tradition that is personally meaningful to you.

### *Extend kindness to those in need*

Look for opportunities to show compassion to those around you. Offer help to a neighbor or community member facing challenges, visit a nursing home and brighten the day of elderly residents, or simply express your appreciation to a friend or family member through a heartfelt email or text.

### *Reconnect with friends or family you haven't seen recently*

Whether you meet for a meal, coffee, or just have a phone call together, staying in touch with those whose company you enjoy is a great spirit-lifter and gift to yourself.

### *Surprise a Stranger*

Small acts of generosity are a great way to feel joy and give it. Something as simple as buying a coffee for the person behind you at a coffee shop, or paying a bus fare or freeway toll for someone boarding or driving behind you is a great, inexpensive act that immediately lifts your spirits.

### *Do something different*

Don't fall into routine. If you are under stress, it can contribute to a feeling of dread. Instead, try something completely different. Try eating out instead of preparing a big holiday meal; make an evening of driving through holiday lights in nearby neighborhoods; agree to only give gifts to the children in the family and skip gift-giving with adults.

### *Find positive ways to remember loved ones*

If holidays remind you of loved ones who are no longer with us, take the opportunity to do something to celebrate their memory. For example, cooking their favorite dish, seeing a movie they loved, or donating to a charity they supported.

### *Host an evening with friends and neighbors*

Who said holiday parties are required? Invite several friends, neighbors, co-workers, or others you know who may not have holiday plans to join you for a dinner out (no need to make it a big deal at your home), a night of board games, or to go to a movie.



## EASY HOLIDAY DESSERTS THAT START WITH A CAN OF SODA...

*Let's face it, we're not all great at baking, and the more ingredients you buy, the more a baking "flop" hurts. This month, we're letting the less-skilled bakers among us get a leg up. Each of the following holiday dessert recipes uses one of our favorite ingredients—a can of soda pop—and cake mix. They're easy, inexpensive, and delicious! Give them a try!*

### LUMINOUS LEMON LIME CAKE

#### INGREDIENTS

1 Box of store-bought cake mix (can be white, vanilla, lemon, or yellow)  
1 12-oz can of lemon lime soda (ex: Sprite, Mountain Dew, Sierra Mist, etc.)  
Cool Whip or whipped cream (for the frosting)

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Empty the cake mix and can of soda into a mixing bowl. Stir together with a spoon or use an electric mixer; note that the batter will foam at first, but will settle down as the ingredients are blended.

Pour the batter into a cake pan greased with non-stick spray.

Bake for 30 minutes at the temperature indicated on the cake box.

Allow the cake to cool at room temperature, then frost it with the Cool Whip.

### (DONNER'S ON A) DIET DR. PEPPER BROWNIES

#### INGREDIENTS

1 box brownie mix  
2 egg whites  
10 oz. of Diet Dr. Pepper

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Empty all ingredients into a mixing bowl and mix until well blended.

Pour the batter into a greased baking dish.

Bake according to the brownie package instructions.

### OH SO JOLLY! ORANGE CUPCAKES

#### INGREDIENTS

1 Box of store-bought white cake mix  
1 12-oz can of orange soda (ex: Orange Crush, SunKist, Fanta, etc.)  
Zest of 1 orange  
8 oz. Whipped topping or store-bought frosting

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Empty the cake mix and can of soda into a mixing bowl. Mix until well blended.

Pour the batter into a cupcake pan greased with non-stick spray or lined with cupcake liners.

Heat oven to 375 degrees (or 350 for dark/nonstick pans) and bake for 14-20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Allow the cupcakes to cool at room temperature, then frost them with the whipped toping (or icing) and garnish with the orange zest.

