

Coping With Stress: 7 Easy Ways to Prevent Wedding Insanity

Let's not beat around the bush: planning a wedding is hard work. With all those decisions and responsibilities, it's easy to see how some brides and grooms get completely consumed in the minutiae. So how do stressed-out, site-seeing, menu-sampling couples get their eyes back on the ball? By taking a breather from the planning process. Get ready to clear your schedules and forget about picking the favors - the following list of eight stress-breaking activities will help you remove yourselves from nuptial hassles and restore your sanity.

1. Declare a wedding-free weekend! For a full 48-hour period pretend you're the two people you were before you got engaged (and in the meantime, remind yourselves of why you wanted to get married to each other in the first place). No wedding planning or fighting allowed! No talk of hors d'oeuvres, seating charts, or first dance songs. Hang out, laugh, have fun, and flirt with each other for a change.

2. Have a night out with the girls (or boys). With all the "togetherness" of being a future bride and groom, remind yourselves you're individuals too. Book a night out with your respective same-sex posse (again, no wedding talk). Hit the town like a swinging single and stay out past midnight. Take advantage of the fact that your future spouse isn't around to do something with your friends he or she doesn't like to do - we're talking chick flick, batting cages, steak dinner, manicures. Then entertain each other with tales of your exploits!

3. Go on a fancy date. Chances are, for the past few months you've been scrimping and saving every extra nickel to supplement The Budget. If you've done well, reward yourselves for your miserly skills by spending a little of that cold hard cash. Book a table at the fanciest restaurant in town and go the full monty: fine wine, entree, dessert, and after-dinner drinks. Afterward, stop in a local jazz club and catch a torch singer belting out tunes de l'amour!

4. Take a drive. Reserve a weekend afternoon and head for the open road. Check out that little place a couple of towns over that you always mean to visit. Test each other's map-reading skills. Play road games like, Who Can Spot the Most Out-of-State License Plates? Sing along to cheesy songs on the radio. Buy a souvenir at a highway truck stop. Stumble upon a romantic restaurant for lunch or dinner before heading home.

5. Mastermind a movie marathon. There's nothing like a good movie to transport you from reality to fantasy. Take the phone off the hook, rent a whole slew of films, and spend an evening in, snacking on popcorn and choc-tops. The trick here is to stay away from wedding-theme fare -- sorry, this includes *Father of the Bride* -- while keeping the romance theme going with a funny rom-com. Laughter, after all, is still the best stress reliever!

6. Get in some game play. Sometimes a little healthy competition serves to make you closer, right? Challenge your mate to a night of games: Pictionary, Scrabble, Monopoly, even good old cards. If you own a Sony PlayStation 2, take the high-tech road to fun. Rather venture out? Head for the nearest bowling alley -- or look into go-carts, ice-skating, and tennis tournaments for other fun and sporty activities to enjoy a deux!

7. Engage in an eat-a-thon. If you both love to cook, compose a special theme menu for a romantic at-home date. Go shopping together and pick the freshest produce around (maybe there's a farmer's market near you) -- and remember to include some aphrodisiac ingredients! Nab a bouquet and some candles to pretty up your table while you're at it. Once

at home, take time to really enjoy the meal prep process. Put on your Masterchef aprons and go for it. Line up all your ingredients on the countertop and open a bottle of wine. And take lots of liberties when it comes to recipes -- nothing's better than creating signature dishes together!