

Let's forget about 'Stressmas' – formally known as Christmas

By Julia Hanna

We feel it in the air, we hear it in the music, and we see it in the red and green all around us. Yes, the holiday season is officially upon us. This is the season where we should feel jolly. Instead, we often find ourselves feeling panicked, anxiety ridden and exhausted from overeating and overspending. In spite of this (I will admit it if you will), I still look forward to the insanity every year. There's a magic that comes with the madness. It's the season to believe and hope for renewal. If it has been a year we wish to forget, we can stomp on it and toss it out. If we have had the good fortune of living a good year, it's the time to remember it with joy. Nevertheless, the season is here. We can't stop it, so let's find new ways to enjoy it. If the season leaves you feeling spent physically as well as financially, can I be presumptuous enough to suggest we do things differently this year by simplifying our lives? As time goes by we need the holidays more and more. As we get busier and more global, it's the one time of year where we're given permission to stop and be together with the people we care about. That's a very beautiful thing. However, there are a few negative factors that have led many to declare the season



to be named nothing other than 'Stressmas'. My nonna used to say, "If you are going to join the band they will make you march." It's a saying that I believe holds much relevance to the craziness of the holiday season. Is that what we are doing, marching automatically to the tune of spend, spend, spend? That doesn't have to be the case. When you think about it, the customs and traditions associated with the holidays aren't the most important part of them. It's the act of spending time with all of the people we love and showing our gratitude toward each other that makes Christmas so special. If you're one of the people who want to take part in simplifying your life this season, how about a delicious holiday brunch? This could really freshen things up. It involves getting together at a time of day when we're not tired, and guests can get home at a decent hour. I have a suggestion for a great meal for your brunch that consists of a mimosa, salad, strata and a yogurt parfait. The entire meal can be found at www.healthyfam.ca/recipes-2/.



The best part of this brunch is that you can prepare everything the day before and quickly put it together before your guests arrive. This whole meal can be deliciously prepared easily by anyone, even the most novice of cooks. In fact, it's a meal that has been prepared by the children in the Kids Culinary Community through Healthyfam and can be seen in a video on www.healthyfam.ca/programs/kid-sculinarycommunity/. I hope you all forget about 'Stressmas' and have a wonderful Christmas.

Julia's Breakfast Strata

This is a great brunch dish. It is made ahead of time and baked when needed, filling the house with a wonderful aroma.

- 8 eggs

- 3 cups low fat milk
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup fully cooked ham, bite sized pieces*
- 3 cups of fresh baby spinach
- 2 cups sliced fresh mushrooms (optional)
- 10 cups cubed bread
- Nonstick cooking spray

In a large bowl, beat eggs; add the milk, mustard, basil and salt. Gently stir in remaining ingredients until well mixed. Spray 13-inch x 9-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Pour ingredients into the greased baking dish. Cover and refrigerate 8 hours or overnight.

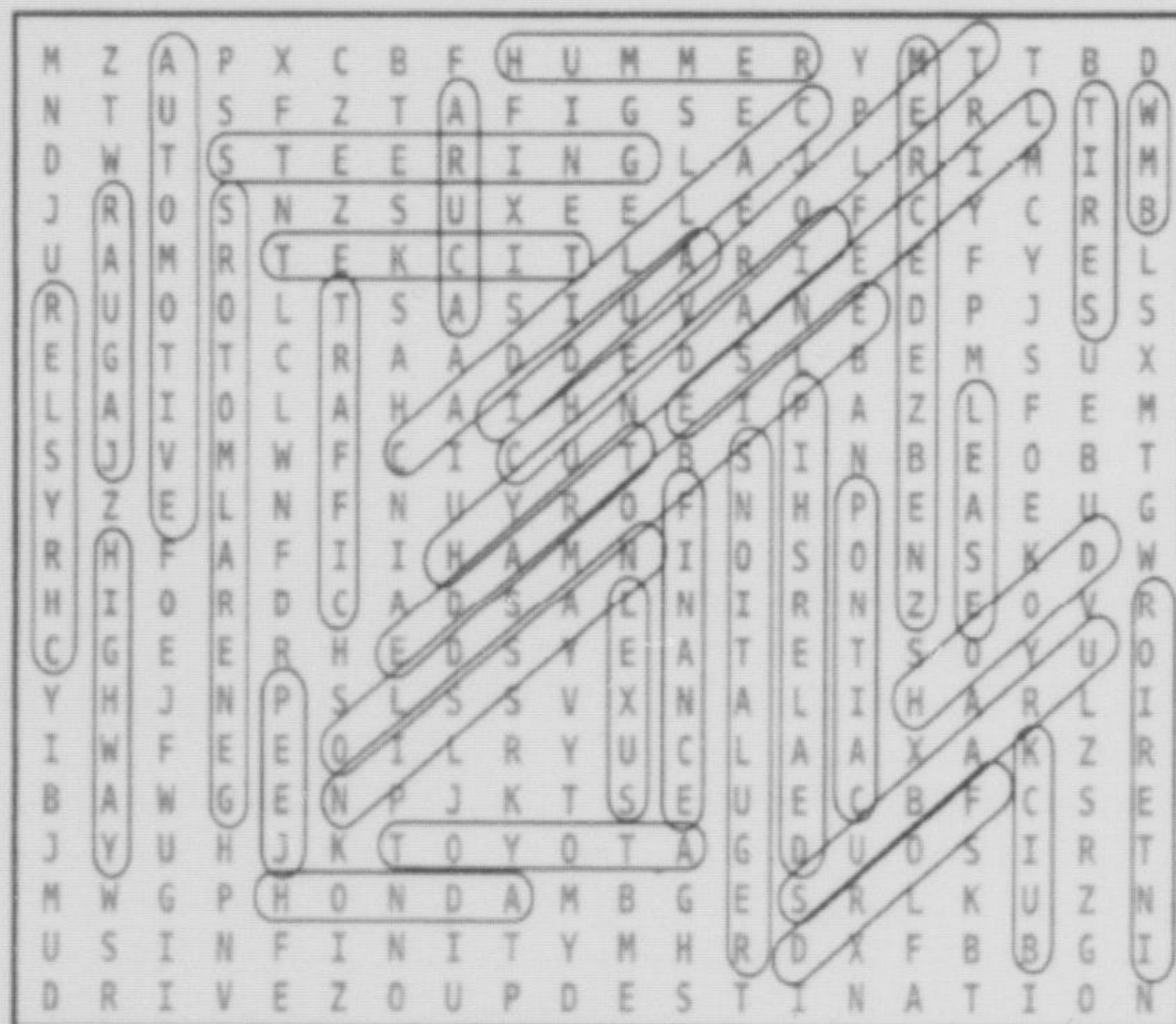
Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before baking. Bake, covered for 30 minutes, at 350°F for 1 hour or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Let stand for 10 minutes before cutting.

*You can use your leftover turkey as a substitute for the ham.

Servings: 10 - 12

Halton chef and restaurateur Julia Hanna is the founder of the Healthyfam, a non-profit organization that teaches people the value of eating right, staying fit and connecting with each other on a regular basis to build a strong family foundation. Her column runs monthly.

Puzzle solutions



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