

WIND IT DOWN

SIGNAL THAT THE PARTY IS OVER (SUBTLY)

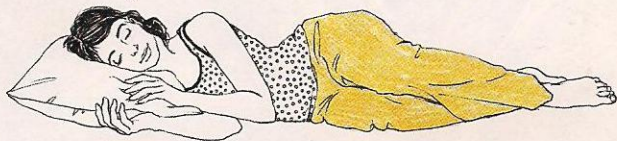
Lower the music, blow out a few candles, turn on one light. If guests don't get the hint, resort to plan B: Start cleaning up.

DOLE OUT LEFTOVERS

"Buy Chinese to-go boxes for people to take extras home," says Kobrin. "The more you get out and give away, the better." (Takeout boxes, 50 for \$19.50, save-on-crafts.com.)

TIDY UP A TAD (THEN HIT THE HAY)

After guests are gone, take out the trash and recycling so your house doesn't smell like a bar when you wake up. "Check for furniture or carpet stains and treat those immediately, but otherwise leave the heavy cleaning and furniture moving until morning," says Andalman.



YOUR HOLIDAY-PARTY HORROR STORIES

Should a drink spill or chutney make its way onto your new sofa, at least you can take heart knowing that you sidestepped these more dramatic disasters.

"THE HOUSE REEKED OF EGGS."

The day of a Christmas party, we had a clogged sink in our kitchen. It cleared after a few hours of snaking, but our place smelled like rotten eggs for the first hour of the party.

—Elizabeth Zielinski, Chantilly, Virginia

"MY WEDDING CHINA CAME CRASHING DOWN."

When I opened my hutch to get a wineglass during a Christmas party, the shelf gave out, sending all my wedding china smashing to the tile floor below.

—Melissa Lunn Douglas, Phoenix

"FONDUE EXPLOSION!"

For a fondue party, I accidentally put baking soda into the pot instead of cornstarch. It started bubbling up and over the pot like a yellow volcano.

—Kristin Anderson, Croton-on-Hudson, New York

"THE CHRISTMAS TREE FELL OVER."

My mom loves to recount the time our tree toppled onto some guests, spilling drinks on the gifts. Now we tie the tree to the window frame with fishing line.

—Chelsea Lancaster, Cromwell, Connecticut

"MY GUEST PUKED."

In the middle of my party, one of the guests got sick and couldn't make it to the bathroom in time. Her Champagne

punch came back up—all over my carpeting. As a holiday gift, she rented me a steam cleaner.

—Ryan Langam, Dallas

"THE TOILET OVERFLOWED."

Two hours before guests were to arrive for a Christmas Eve gathering, the toilet directly above the kitchen overflowed and water began flooding the bathroom and kitchen. In a rush to get everything under control, my son came zooming through the house with a sopping-wet mop over his shoulder—dripping directly over three baking days' worth of cookies, pies, and biscotti.

—Lynda Johns Cafardi, Montoursville, Pennsylvania

"A FOUR-YEAR-OLD CRASHED MY PARTY."

We hosted a cocktail party late in the evening, and one of my husband's coworkers showed up with his daughter. I had to scramble to find something for the little one to eat, since her mother was appalled that I had nothing child-friendly on the buffet. When the kid finally got sleepy, the parents wanted to move her upstairs into one of our bedrooms so they could stay and party.

—Brianna DeRosa, Cranston, Rhode Island