



FEELING SNOWED UNDER?

A guide to surviving Christmas

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We all recognise that Christmas and New Year are times of great celebration providing people with an opportunity to come together, exchange gifts, share memories and show friends and family how important they are to us.

However it is almost impossible to get through Christmas without experiencing some level of stress.

For many it can be a time that brings financial pressure, stress, loneliness and can remind us of sad times in our lives.

There are practical steps which we can take all year round to look after your own and others' mental health. Here are just a few:

- don't over indulge
- take time for relaxation
- fit in some time for exercise such as a gentle walk
- if you can try to be around other people

This booklet gives some handy hints and tips for surviving the festive season as well as useful information and telephone numbers in case you need support.

Tips and hints for before the holiday

Collect the phone numbers of the out of hours and emergency services that will be available (many are at the end of this booklet). Keep this near your phone, or somewhere you can find it easily.

The Mental Health Foundation's tips to surviving Christmas

1. Drink sensibly

“The celebratory spirit of Christmas and New Year often involves social drinking and although the consumption of alcohol might make you feel more relaxed, it is important to remember that alcohol is a depressant and drinking excessive amounts can cause low mood, irritability or potentially aggressive behaviour. By not exceeding the recommended number of safe units, you will be better able to sustain good mental and physical wellbeing.”

2. Eat well

“The festive period has become synonymous with over-indulgence, which in turn prompts a pressing desire for many of us to lose weight in the New Year. Therefore, where possible, it is important to maintain a good balance of fruit, vegetables, carbohydrates, protein and omega 3 sources throughout the year in order to help us work towards weight loss in a sensible way. Maintaining a healthy diet and weight can improve your mood and can work towards preventing symptoms of lethargy and irritability that many of us feel during the busy festive season and dark winter months.”

3. Be active

“Exercise releases the feel-good chemicals, endorphins, which help you to relax, feel happy and boost your mood. By undertaking simple tasks such as cycling to work, walking in the park, or joining in with Christmas games, you can benefit from experiencing reduced anxiety, decreased depression and improved self-esteem. In addition, recent research has indicated that regular exercise can help to boost our immune systems, enabling us to better fight off colds and flu viruses that are prolific in winter months.”

4. Get involved

“The festive period provides us with an ideal opportunity to talk to, visit or engage with the people around us. Face-to-face communication has been shown to improve our mental and physical wellbeing as this interaction produces the hormone, oxytocin, which can benefit our immune system, heart health and cognitive function.

With our Lonely Society? report from earlier in the year having indicated that a third of us have a close friend or family member we think is lonely, a Christmas or new year's resolution to see our friends and family more often can help to boost both our own mental wellbeing, and that of others. If you are apart from your family then volunteering for a charity or local community organisation can provide that same human contact, as well as help provide essential support and encouragement for others in need. These interactions can easily be sustained throughout the coming year and need not just be for Christmas."

5. Relax

"Christmas can be a very busy and stressful time as we prepare to entertain family and friends, worry about cooking a delicious Christmas dinner, and fit in some last minute present shopping. These feelings of being under pressure can produce symptoms of anxiety, anger and difficulty sleeping which, if prolonged, could have a long-term detrimental impact on your mental health and wellbeing. By exercising more regularly or practicing mindfulness – a combination of meditation, yoga and breathing techniques – you can help to both alleviate the symptoms of your stress and gain more control when coping with difficult situations. Christmas presents aside, implementing a new exercise regime or signing up for a course in mindfulness could be your best investment for a more relaxed Christmas and New Year."

6. Sleep

"Despite many of us having time off work during Christmas and the New Year, our sleep patterns can be disturbed between catching up with friends and family and partying late in to the night. There is mounting evidence on the link between sleep and mental wellbeing, meaning improvements in the quality of your sleep could result in improvements to your overall mental health. There are several steps you can take towards achieving a better night's sleep: attempting to get back in to your regular sleep routine as soon as possible after the party period, consuming less alcohol during the festivities, implementing regular exercise into your weekly routine, and taking measures to alleviate your stress".

Opening hours for public services

Access to health and social work services over the holidays

In Scotland most services will close for the two public holidays at Christmas and New Year. This year they will be closed starting from Friday 25th December until Monday 28th December. They will reopen again on Tuesday 29th December. They will close again on Friday 1st January and reopen again on Tuesday 5th January.

This year almost half of all Lanarkshire GP surgeries will open extra hours on the two festive Mondays – 28 December and 4 January – for urgent appointments. Check with your local surgery for details.

Although there will be fewer staff in some of the services due to the holiday period, people who require support during this period will receive it through pre-planning.

Remember to contact NHS24 on 111 if your GP surgery is closed for access to any health services.

Under emergency circumstances A&E and 999 services will work as normal.

To access information on health services over the festive period, including pharmacy opening times, visit: www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk/HealthyLiving/Winter or call well informed at 0800 073 0918.

Tips and hints for during the holiday period

Make sure you have enough medication to last you throughout the holiday period.

For leisure services, check the websites at:

NL Leisure
www.nlleisure.co.uk

Culture NL
www.culturenl.co.uk

Top tips to keep Christmas stress to a minimum

Aim for “enjoyable” not “perfect”. Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Don't try to make it perfect.

- Recognise that being together 24/7 may cause tensions, and allow for this.
- Minimise “are we nearly there yet?” issues when travelling. It is so disappointing to make travel plans in order to promote family togetherness only to get to the destination feeling stressed. Include pre-planned rest stops, drinks and snacks, music and books on tape, and lots of activities for the kids in the back. Travel off-peak if possible.
- Find time for yourself. Don't spend all your time providing activities for your family and friends. If you're a parent, remember your own need to have fun, and aim for a balance of activities that meet everyone's needs.
- Planning and teamwork: Involve the family in plans and in the workload. Children can have some say, and parents' needs count as well.
- Don't try to do it all.

Tips and hints for Christmas planning

Plan out what you need to do over the festive season.

Use the booklet to talk things over with a few friends or family.

Make plans with services you are currently receiving such as health and social care workers, support workers or peer supporters.

Staying safe during the festive season

Heading out

- Be prepared – ensure you have enough money for your day/night out and enough to get home if you plan on using public transport or a taxi.
- Carry a mobile phone with credit in it if possible.
- If you are drinking alcohol be careful, there is nothing wrong with having a good time but beware of what is going on around you.

Going home

- Try to arrange how you are getting home at the start of the night, either a lift, public transport or a taxi. If necessary pre-book a taxi for later on.
- If you are close enough to home to walk then take care. Try to stick to busy, lit areas and not quiet, isolated areas. Also watch for underfoot conditions.
- Be careful with cigarettes in the home after a night out; ensure they are completely out before going to sleep.
- When drinking alcohol on a night out always have a way of getting home organised – never drink and drive, it takes very little to be over the limit.

Useful Numbers

Local Support

Well Informed mental health and wellbeing information service – 0800 073 0918

Stress Control Classes – 0300 303 0447

Occupational Therapy Community Clinics – 0800 073 0918

Benefits, Welfare & Debt Advice – 01698 403170

Elament Lanarkshire's online mental health and wellbeing information website: www.elament.org.uk

Other numbers

Samaritans – 116 123

Breathing Space – 0800 838 587

There is also advice and support through the website:
www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

AA - Alcoholics Anonymous - 0845 769 7555
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Narcotics Anonymous
National Helpline – 0300 999 1212
www.ukna.org

ParentLine – 0800 800 2222

NHS 24 – 111

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 027 1234

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