

**time to change**

let's end mental health discrimination



**'Tis the Season to be less stressed**

**Thriving at Christmas**

**Mental Health Tips for the festive season**



**“There’s just so much to do before Christmas!”**



Work is often busy, but with Christmas fast approaching, the final few weeks before the 25th can become overwhelming. Office parties, tying up loose ends, shopping for your ‘Secret Santa’ and then trying to resist all the mince pies and sweets that are readily available. And that’s just work! Outside of the workplace you’re probably juggling a million other tasks to ensure that you and your family have the best Christmas possible.

Mind found that **1 in 10 people feel unable to cope with this time of the year** and that’s just from the people they have been in contact with. With a population of over 66.5 million in England, that statistic means that over 6.65 million people potentially feel unable to cope with this time of the year.

So whilst Christmas can be a magical time for many, it can also be a really stressful time for many others.

### **Christmas can = poor mental health**

Worries about money, loneliness, feeling surrounded and more are just some of the emotions that Christmas can trigger in many of us.

### **That’s okay.**

Christmas is a great time to ramp up your self-care whilst also raising awareness with family, friends and colleagues. We must all prioritise our mental health and wellbeing over the festive period. And we have some tips and guides below to help you structure your plan around self-care and wellbeing so that your mental health is maintained and managed allowing you the freedom to live your life.





## Physical Health at Christmas

The festive period can often be an indulgent one and our routines become disrupted. During that time **we often forget to balance everything out with self-care**. As a result many of us are left feeling overwhelmed, burned out and scattered which is very stressful. With this in mind it is worth thinking about the points below.

### Alcohol

With so many gatherings or parties happening, alcohol tends to be free flowing with consumption being highest at this time of year. Try to keep yourself hydrated – have a soft drink or glass of water in between rounds. Avoid drinking on an empty stomach and keep up with your vitamins and minerals as they tend to leave our bodies very quickly.

### Fun & Safety

Part of self-care is also about **staying safe** when out and about. **Never** leave your drink unattended at a party; it's too easy for someone to spike it. Have a plan ready as to how you will get home. It might help to keep your fare home separate from your main pool of cash so that you don't spend it by accident and are able to get home safely in a registered and licensed taxi. This is a good life-tip in general but with merry moods and alcohol flowing it's worth being extra vigilant.

### Food

For many of us the festive season is about the many delicious foods associated with it. Holidays give us a license to over indulge and let's face it, many of us do so with gusto. However we also know it's important to balance that out – especially as feeling bloated can leave us feeling tired and lethargic. So why not plan ahead some family or "me time" walks around the festive period. If that doesn't work for you how about factoring in some fun activities that involve movement or at the very least don't involve eating. Ice skating, roaming Christmas markets or Winter Wonderlands, dancing to terrible Christmas songs – whatever takes your fancy really.

## Sexual Health

You're at an office party feeling all friendly and sociable. You're speaking with someone and feel you're really getting to know them. As the night draws on you find yourself feeling amorous towards the person / colleague / friend etc... Whatever else happens you definitely don't want to wake up the next day panicking that you didn't protect yourself in the heat of that moment and having to deal with more than regret the morning after. It's a great idea (and literally a stress saver) to make sure you are prepared by having protection on you so that you don't risk unwanted pregnancies or STIs!

If you're worried you have made a mistake, a natter with a good friend usually helps. However if you don't have anyone to talk to and are affected by your experience – then [Samaritans](#) on **116 123** are a 24hr helpline you can always approach.

## Colds and flus

Food and drink aren't the only things free flowing at Christmas. 'Tis the season to be sick if you're not careful. Keep yourself warm and hydrated. It's always a good idea to keep remedies and cold bashing formulas like lemon and honey, paracetamol etc. stocked up at home for you and your family...especially if you can't keep away from a sick colleague or people coughing on public transport. Consider getting a flu jab from your local GP surgery or pharmacy. Your workplace may offer vouchers that pay for the jab so do check with your HR lead.

## Rest and Sleep

We know we have to get rest and high quality sleep. Without rest and sleep we can become severely ill. Yet it's so easy to deprioritise rest when you have so much to get through. But lack of sleep and rest leaves us tired, irritable and unable to function properly. Our invitation to you is to keep a routine going as routines can help you sleep. Try to get to bed by a certain time. Factor in rest periods after busy periods. For more tips on getting to sleep and dealing with insomnia visit the [The Sleep Council](#) and [NHS](#) websites.



## Emotional impact of Christmas on mental health

Now that we have talked about how to look after yourself from a physical perspective, let's look at the emotional side.

### Avoiding unhelpful potentially harmful comparisons with others

Christmas is a time of year where it's easier to look at what others have got in their lives. This sense of inadequacy can be exacerbated by social media leaving many of us feeling sad, upset or even left behind. This will affect your mental health and wellbeing and we invite you to consider how you are using Facebook, Instagram etc. if you're not feeling well. Our second invitation is to think about all the great things that you have in your life; things that you truly cherish and value. They could be anything and they don't have to be big. Sometimes it might be a real struggle to think of good things but it could be as basic as having time off over Christmas.

### Realistic expectations about family gatherings

One of the most common themes surrounding festive dinners with the family, are **"family feuds"**. The reality is that you might have family members who haven't seen or spoken to each other since last Christmas in one room together. Increased expectations could leave relations feeling strained. Whilst you may not have control over what people may or may not say to each other, you can manage your expectations (especially if you are hosting). Arguments might happen but whatever happens, it is not a reflection on you or your hosting skills. Remember to look after yourself. Change the subject if you feel a conflict brewing or leave the room if you need some time alone.

### Me Time

Factor in times that are just about you. Practicing relaxation and mindfulness is a great way to keep stress levels at bay. Keep an eye on routines that are at risk of being disrupted and see if you can retain elements of them so that you continue with a familiar structure. This will likely keep you grounded and ultimately support your mental health. And of course, try to do things you love doing – need we say more?



## The Positive Impact of Social Connection

Two of the five strands of wellbeing are '**Connecting**' and '**Giving**'. Below is a list of some things you can do to connect with your family, friends and your local community. Giving your time and care can make a really big difference to your own mental health.

Things you can do are:

- **Participate in a local community choir** –or just go carol singing (fundraising) with family and friends.
- **Channel your inner child and connect with your kids** – build snowpeople/ have snowball fights (if it snows) or even make something. Craft related activities such as making Christmas decorations.
- **Donate to a food bank** – not just essentials but maybe something nice or a little bit special to give someone struggling some hope.
- **General random acts of kindness** – a little kindness goes a long way and can make the biggest difference to people.

## Financial wellbeing

Avoid getting into debt just to make one day perfect. Easier said than done right? Mind found from its survey (2015) that over 41% got into debt because of Christmas. The likelihood is that this debt may linger longer than you would like and could ultimately impact on your mental health, especially if you are struggling with your finances generally.

- To avoid getting into debt **Speak to your HR lead at work for advice**. Many workplaces offer **employee assistance programmes** that include **free access to financial advisors** and debt management specialists.
- Manage people's expectations and your own in terms of buying presents – do you really need to buy a present for everyone? A great idea is to limit present giving to children only so they get the magic of Christmas and adults avoid the pressure to give and receive.
- Manage Christmas pressure from children who don't realise it's an expensive time – let them pick one big present and then make little things or buy edible treats for their stocking etc. If they insist on more you can suggest splitting Christmas with birthdays perhaps. Christmas should never be about how many presents people get.
- If you are struggling with debt then please talk to [Step Change](#) who are a national debt charity and can talk you through possible solutions. You can call them on **0800 138 1111** 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 4pm on Saturdays. **Be sure to check their website for Christmas opening hours.**

## Finally...Try to plan ahead

- **Journal your experience**, costs etc and the impact on you this year so that you can use it to help you with next year

## Mental Health at work during the festive season

You can take care of your mental health in the workplace and help your colleagues too by sharing the following;

**Does your employer offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)?** It's a fantastic resource that is completely free (paid for by your Employer if they offer it) confidential and often available 24 hours a day (check with your provider). What's more they offer a menu of support and contrary to popular belief are not just about counselling – as highlighted in our financial tips section. If you have one, please do promote your EAP at work by sharing details on how they can help people struggling with mental health over the festive period.

### **Why not visit Mind's website?**

The Mind website also has loads of information on how to survive the Christmas period in the workplace and wrapping up; such as:

[Wrapping up over Christmas,](#)

[Ten Christmas wellbeing tips](#)

[Managing your mental health at Christmas](#)



**Remember to look after yourself this Christmas.**