



SURVIVING CHRISTMAS



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.



Managing stress and expectations

Manage your expectations and have more fun

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.



The Mental Health Foundation's tips to surviving Christmas

1. Drink sensibly

The celebratory spirit of Christmas and New Year often involves social drinking. Although the consumption of alcohol might make you feel more relaxed, it is important to remember that alcohol is a depressant. 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.

Our *Lonely Society?* report from earlier in the year showed 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 Monday **25th December until Tuesday 26th December**. They will reopen on **Wednesday 27th December**.

They will close again on **Monday 1st January** and reopen again on **Wednesday 3rd January**.

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. For social work emergency services call **0303 123 1008**.

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 visit:

www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk/HealthyLiving/Winter or call South Lanarkshire Infoline: 0330 3000 133.



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 website South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture: **www.slleisureandculture.co.uk**

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

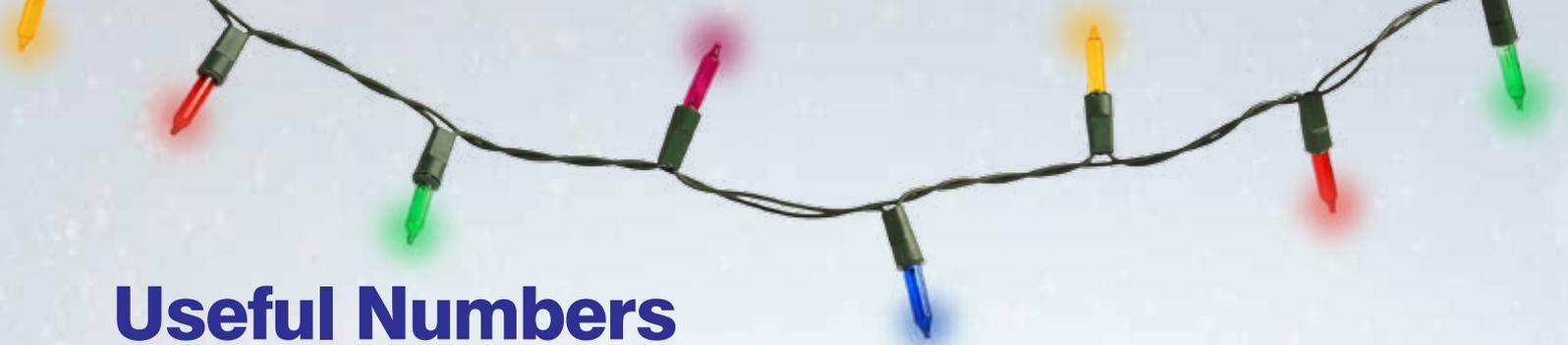
- Try to arrange how you are getting home at the start of the night, either a lift, public transport or a taxi. If necessary pre-book a taxi for later on.
- If you are close enough to home to walk then take care. Try to stick to busy, lit areas and not quiet, isolated areas. Also watch for underfoot 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.

Fire safety

- Check your smoke and heat alarms are working. Replace batteries if necessary.
- If you have an open fire make sure your chimney is swept before winter. Always use a fire guard, secured in position, to protect against flying sparks from hot embers.
- Never place Christmas cards or decorations around the mantelpiece.
- Check your Christmas light plugs are fitted with the correct fuse, don't overload extension leads and ensure all electrical devices are Intertek BEAB approved.
- Always switch Christmas lights off and unplug them before you go to bed.
- Decorations can burn easily – don't place them near lights or heaters.
- Never leave cooking unattended, especially when using hot oil. For early warning of fire consider fitting a heat alarm in your kitchen.
- Take time to check on elderly relatives and neighbours this Christmas as they are at greater risk from fire, particularly if they suffer from ill health or disability.

For more advice and information from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, check out their Winter and Festive Safety leaflet or go to their website at www.firescotland.gov.uk





Useful Numbers

Local Support

South Lanarkshire Infoline for information on mental health and wellbeing services:
0330 3000 133

Stress Control Classes: **0300 303 0447**

Occupational Therapy Community Clinics:
0330 3000 133

Benefits, Welfare & Debt Advice: **0303 123 1008**

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: **<http://breathingspace.scot>**

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

Need this brochure in another format?

Call: 01698 332062

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