



**Happy Christmas from
South Tyneside Change 4
Life Health and Wellbeing
Champions Network**



Plan How to Reduce Christmas Blues

1. Identify some worthwhile things to do
2. List them down
3. Ensure your plans will help achieve your goal
4. Do your best then try not to judge the results

What are these holiday blues? Sadness, pressure, loneliness, guilt, depression, anger, frustration, bitterness. List goes on. Take a few minutes to sit down with a blank piece of paper and a pen. First accept your situation, then ask yourself what you would like to eliminate to ensure a less stressful Christmas holiday. By having a clear picture of what you want to do and what you want to avoid, you have the first tool for eliminating your holiday blues.

How to Avoid Christmas Blues

- If you're at home, pamper yourself by having good food, good music, and those good books waiting to be read.
- Check your local churches. There may be groups organising potluck dinners on Christmas and New Year's Day. Some may even have other events to help relieve the after-the holiday blues.
- Take a short trip, a day trip to some place you've always wanted to visit but haven't had the chance to do.
- Play Christmas music to keep you company and "alive" instead of feeling the blues.
- Take a walk, a good walk to enjoy the rain, the snow or the sun. You can even go and admire the local lights or the decorations in the shopping centres and hotels. Simply enjoy the moment and be thankful for your blessings.
- Find something nice to do. Listen to your favourite music, buy something for yourself, or you can even take a long bubble bath.
- Indulge yourself in a phone call to someone you care about or call trusted friends to talk. It's worth the call charges if it makes you feel better. Plan ahead so you know they're available.
- If you are scheduled to work, plan a special dinner with others on your shift-work. Bring food to share, play Christmas music, sing along during breaks.
- Rent fun movies from your nearby video/DVD shops and watch them; something to do after you have opened your gifts.
- Find opportunities to hug. It will make you feel truly great. If there's no one to hug, hug your throw pillow. It works!

Release unnecessary expectations about your feelings and events, and enjoy whatever good comes along.

While the Christmas blues can be agonising, it is possible that you can get through it and enjoy the Christmas season. Concentrating on the unpleasant won't mend what is going on in your life. You should focus on all the good that you are surrounded by and keep fixated on that.

4 Ways to Overcome Christmas Stress

1. Get specific and practical about Christmas anxieties. Figure out exactly what you're stressed about at Christmas, and deal with it. For example, if you're worried about money, then do a gift exchange and draw names in your family. Or, research inexpensive, easy homemade gifts (eg, make cards detailing what you and others love and appreciate about someone). Consider Christmas gift shopping online. If you're worried about your diet and exercise levels, schedule specific times to exercise - and stick with your plan. Deal with stress in practical ways, and remember that holiday anxiety increases when you feel you have no control.

2. Ask for help to reduce holiday anxiety. If you're cooking Christmas dinner and are filled with holiday anxiety, ask for help from people around you. If you don't know what gifts to give to family and friends ask for suggestions. If you're worried that your uncle will get drunk and mean, contact a counsellor or family member for practical ways to prevent or avoid the situation. Ending holiday anxiety involves reaching out to others, especially over the Christmas season. Holiday stress and Christmas anxiety will be easier to overcome when you don't feel like you're in it alone.

3. Accept imperfections to overcome stress. The family will fight, the gifts will disappoint, the dog will knock down the tree, and the turkey will be dry. It's inevitable that some troubles will arise during the holiday season; going with the flow and accepting flaws as part of life is key to overcoming Christmas stress. Holiday season anxiety - and many types of stress - comes from unrealistic expectations. When you accept imperfections, you'll reduce holiday anxiety because you'll have realistic goals and expectations.

4. Treat yourself over the holiday season. Pamper yourself with a massage, do your nails, get cosy with hot chocolate and watch your favourite programme, have a long bath / shower. Or work up a sweat by skating, going for a walk in the snow, go swimming - physical activity is one of the best ways to reduce holiday season anxiety. Express your feelings to a friend, in your journal, or with music. Get enough sleep. Go to a movie in the middle of the day. Indulge in some chocolate or holiday baking, but don't overdo it!

Reducing Christmas anxiety and stress can be as simple as talking a walk and sip hot chocolate, or as complicated as creating a schedule for your family, to make your holidays happy.

Be Happy Being Alone at Christmas?

- Be thankful for what you have. Do you have food? Clothing? Shelter? Then you can be glad knowing that you have much. Many people would be happy to trade places with you just to have one or more of these things in their life.
- Celebrating Christmas doesn't have to be done according to tradition. Make Christmas what you want it to be. Television ads and music bombard us with images of what they think Christmas should be, such as surrounded by a multitude of family and friends, but that's just someone else's idea. Maybe you don't like crowds and parties. For you, Christmas may be a time of enjoying peace and quiet. It can be can be a time of giving to others in need if you want it to be, but it doesn't have to be. Use the time to do something you really enjoy or enjoy doing nothing at all.
- If you are into the food and decorations of Christmas, go ahead and do it up just for you! Who says you need other people around to enjoy those things? Put up that tree, get out your fine dishes and silverware, decorate, buy yourself fresh flowers, play Christmas music, scent your rooms with Christmas potpourri, buy something nice just for you. Treat yourself like the special person you are.
- Realise that times and situations change. What Christmas is like this year may not be what it will be like next year. Celebrate each Christmas as its own unique experience.
- If you are spiritual, you can attend a Christmas Eve service at a church. You can put up a nativity scene. You can spend the time getting closer and communing with God. You could give to those in need though organisations such as World Vision.
- Look on the positive side of things. Take time to remember and enjoy what you have and don't worry about the rest. See each day as a gift and make the best of it. There are no set rules on how you must celebrate Christmas so enjoy the holiday in your own special way.

Tip

- Being alone at Christmas is often than being stressed out having to visit cranky relatives every year. The picture perfect Christmas scene isn't always a reality for those with family and friends around them either.

10 Ways to Look After Your Mental Health at Christmas

The festive season is a time of joy and spending time with loved ones, but it can also be one of the most stressful and lonely periods of the year. During the December rush - frantic present buying and New Year party preparations - followed by the sudden 'lull' of January, it is important to try and remember how to maintain your mental health and wellbeing. Here are 10 ways to take care so you can avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Talk About Your Feelings

It's hard to admit that at such an exciting time of year, you don't actually feel that great. But talking about your feelings can improve your mood and make it easier to deal with the tough times. It's part of taking charge or 'self-managing' your mental wellbeing and doing what you can to stay healthy. It's important to create space for these conversations and also worth identifying who you can speak to if you are concerned about your wellbeing.

Eat Well

Christmas is typically a time of overindulgence, but what we eat can sometimes impact on how we feel. For example, too much sugar can have a noticeable effect on your mental health and wellbeing in the short and long term. Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a little bit of overindulgence, but a good tip is to balance this out over the festive period – everything in moderation!

Keep in Touch and Reach Out

When putting the finishing touches on holiday plans, we can often become distracted from the support systems around us and lose our footing. Friends and family can make you feel included and cared for. They can offer different views from whatever's going on inside your own head, keep you grounded and help you solve practical problems – enjoy this time to catch-up. If alone and/or away from family, the Campaign to End Loneliness provides some helpful resources.

Take a Break

The holiday season is the perfect opportunity to take some time out of your day to day life, and gain some perspective to reflect on the year. Whether spending time away from home or having a stay-cation, re-energise by giving yourself a change of scene or pace - it's good for you! Practicing mindfulness can help you unwind, for more information on how to learn and to take a free stress test, visit www.bemindful.co.uk.

Accept Who You Are

Some of us make people laugh, others cook fantastic meals. Some of us share our lifestyle with the people who live close to us, others live very differently. If you have mental health problems, don't feel pressured to do more than you feel up to.

Remember Christmas is just one day of the year! So whether alone or with others this Christmas, celebrate who you are.

Keep Active

It's no surprise that cold weather and short days are not the greatest motivation to get you out of bed and on a 5k run! But research shows that doing exercise releases chemicals in your body that can make you feel good. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you to concentrate; sleep and feel better. Exercise also keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy. So use that Christmas spirit for physical health as well as mental health - you might even enjoy the crisp air (again everything in moderation!).

Drink Sensibly

Some people drink to deal with fear or loneliness, but the effect is only ever temporary. Christmas parties encourage socialising and it's very easy to get carried away, but know your limits - it's important to maintain your personal wellbeing too. For more information visit <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

Ask for Help

Donning a Christmas jumper can make us feel pretty special, but none of us are superhuman. At times we all get overwhelmed by how we feel, especially when things go wrong. If things are getting too much for you in the next couple of months and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. The Samaritans are available to speak to all year round, their new free helpline number is 116 123 and calls to this helpline number do not appear on phone bills.

Do Something You're Good At

What do you love doing? What activities can you lose yourself in? Enjoying yourself helps beat stress. As busy as the holiday season gets, try and keep up the activities and the hobbies you enjoy all year round. You could turn these into festive activities, like making gifts, or socialising with friends, before spending time with family over the Christmas and New Year period.

Care for Others

Present-buying is not the only way of showing that we care about others. Christmas is the perfect time to reach out to loved ones who you haven't spent much time with in the past year; ask how they've been and whether they have plans for the holidays. Caring for others is an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you. It can even bring you closer together and make you feel good!

For more information visit www.mentalhealth.org.uk

CAP'S TOP TEN TIPS FOR AVOIDING FESTIVE DEBT

1. Decide what you have to spend. Make a list and be realistic. Paying in cash may help you keep control. Let your children see your careful planning – you'll be teaching them a valuable life-long lesson.
2. Manage expectations early. If things are tight don't be afraid to say so to family members. You'll probably all be in the same boat and it may lead to a happier Christmas for them too!
3. See if relatives will club together with you to buy children what they would like, rather than individually over indulging them and all feeling out of pocket.
4. Buy fewer presents but more cheaper trimmings like paper chains and Christmas crackers. They all add to the fun without costing very much.
5. Never take out a Christmas loan! Remember the possible consequences could be disastrous for you and your family.
6. Try to make presents as opposed to buying them. For example, delicious homemade biscuits or fudge make a lovely gift as does a voucher to make your friend their favourite cake, or babysitting for an hour. All show you've spent time and care.
7. Remember – you can't buy love. Don't feel guilty if you can't afford the latest present for your children. Your love and affection will last longer in the memory than any toy can.
8. Don't fall into the trap of reciprocal gift giving and don't buy out of obligation.
9. Don't overspend in the January sales, in spite of how good a bargain you might see. Make a budget and stick to it and if possible, leave those credit cards at home.
10. Enjoy all the low cost things on offer– the lights in town, get-togethers, making mince pies, playing family board games, seeing your kids in the school nativity – and have a very Happy Christmas!

Ten strategies for coping with bad times:

Let's not beat around the bush.

There are times when we all have to deal with situations and circumstances that are likely to be mood-lowering, even for the most resilient individual.

When this happens it's helpful to have some coping strategies on which to fall back.

Think of them as a kind of first-aid kit for the mind.

I'm sure you'll already have a few of your own for such challenging times, but here's a list of ten, one or more of which may be new to you, or at best forgotten.

1. Make a list of the things you like most about yourself.
2. Get out of the house or office to enjoy some time in nature.
3. Forget technology. Talk face-to-face with your family and/or friends.
4. Listen properly to your favourite music, giving it your 100% focus.
5. Fill the bath tub for a long hot soak. Bubbles always help.
6. Polish off a few small jobs you've been meaning to do for ages.
7. Sit down and absorb yourself in a really good book.
8. Watch an amusing TV show or movie.
9. Play with a pet – someone else's if you don't have your own.
10. Do something – anything – spontaneous. Just get up and do it.

Of course not all of these will suit you, but some may.

So keep them in the back of your mind ready for a grey day, just as you might keep medicines in a kitchen or bathroom cupboard.

Rob Braines - South Tyneside Change 4 Life Health and Wellbeing Champions Network