

# Dealing with Christmas Stress

The Christmas holidays can often be a welcome break from the rigours of everyday life. However, for some people, the festive period can be overwhelming and induce feelings of stress and anxiety.

But, by being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support you can alleviate the stress and anxiety from wearing you down and turning what could be a joyful time into a difficult one.

## ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS

If you know it's been a difficult time for you lately, understand that it's normal to feel sad, worried or frustrated. It's okay to take time to acknowledge and express your emotions — don't force yourself to be content just because it's Christmas.

## BE REALISTIC

The Christmas season doesn't have to be perfect or the same as the year before. Families change and grow, and so will traditions and rituals. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to making new ones.

For example, if some family members can't make it to your house, you can still find ways to celebrate together, such as connecting on Facetime or Skype, emails or video sharing.

## SET ASIDE DIFFERENCES

Try to be accepting of your family members and friends as they are, even if they don't always live up to your expectations.

Set aside criticisms until a more suitable time for discussion, and be understanding if others get upset when something doesn't go to plan. They're most likely feeling the effects of 'Christmas stress' too.

Furthermore, try and avoid political or divisive conversations. Everyone has differing opinions and you're extremely unlikely to resolve those differences over the dinner table. An argument can really ruin what should be a joyous occasion.

## STICK TO A BUDGET

Christmas is a big driver of financial stress. People who are suffering from financial stress are more likely to:

- Argue with family and friends about money.
- Have trouble sleeping.
- Experience greater mood swings.
- Increase our desire to be solitary.
- Eat less but crave more unhealthy foods.

To avoid this, before you go shopping for gifts and food, make a decision on how much money you can afford to spend and make sure you stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with a mountain of gifts.

## PLAN AHEAD

Be sure to set aside specific days for shopping, cooking, visiting friends and family, and other activities. Plan your menu and then base your shopping list around it. This will help to avoid any last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. Don't forget to line up help for party preparations and clean up.

## FIND OUT MORE

### LEARN TO SAY NO

Saying yes when you want to say no can often leave you feeling overwhelmed and resentful. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every activity or event. If it's not possible to say no, consider another event in your diary that could be swapped out to make up for the lost time.

### DON'T ABANDON HEALTHY HABITS

Christmas is a time for indulgence, but don't let the festive season become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and anxiety, and can often bring guilt as well.

#### Instead, try to:

- Eat a healthy snack before social gatherings so that you don't go overboard on sweets or drinks.
- Be sure to get plenty of sleep.
- Try to incorporate regular physical activity into each day.

### TAKE A BREATHER AND FIND TIME FOR YOURSELF

Make some time just for yourself where you can. This may rejuvenate you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that decreases stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

#### This can include:

- Going for a walk
- Watching sport without distraction
- Listening to your favourite music
- Getting a massage
- Reading a book

### DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

If you feel isolated or lonely, seek out community or social events. They can provide you with connectedness and support.

If you do find yourself feeling persistently down or anxious, irritable, fatigued, and unable to face day-to-day tasks, don't be afraid to talk to your GP or, contact our friendly team on **1300 687 327** who can put you in contact with an experienced counsellor.



## FIND OUT MORE