



WASHINGTON HEALTH SYSTEM
Center for Mental Health and Wellbeing
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



December
2022



**5 Things You
Should Know
About
Christmas and
Mental Health:**

***Mental Health at Christmas: How to Cope
During the Holidays***

1. 54% of people get worried about the mental health of someone they know at Christmas.
2. 26% of people say Christmas makes their mental health worse.
3. 83% of people feel lonely.
4. 81% of people find Christmas stressful.
5. 47% of people go into debt over Christmas.

To learn more visit:
[Christmas and Mental Health | Coping at Christmas | Priory \(priorygroup.com\)](https://www.priorygroup.com/Christmas-and-Mental-Health-Coping-at-Christmas)

Christmas is traditionally a time of celebration, eating, drinking, spending time with family and friends, and generally enjoying the festive spirit. However, for those who struggle with a mental health condition, the yuletide season can be an especially difficult time.

Whether it's the financial strain that accompanies gift buying, the cold and dark winter nights, or the reality of spending Christmas alone, there can be a number of triggers for mental health problems during the holiday season.

First of all, it's important to recognize that if you're struggling over the Christmas period, you are far from alone. Mental health issues at Christmas affect more of us than you might think. A [survey from YouGov](#) found that a quarter of people say that Christmas makes their mental health worse, while a [survey from the Mental Health Foundation](#) found that 54% of people were worried about the mental health of someone they know at Christmas.

If you're concerned about the mental health of yourself or someone you know this Christmas, this article can help you to recognize the symptoms early and put steps in place to cope – helping you to enjoy the brighter side of the Christmas period.

Depression at Christmas: Society tells us that Christmas is a time of joy, laughter, cheerfulness, family and celebration. However, for people who struggle with depression, these types of pressures and constant reminders that you should be happy, can make you feel even worse.

Key [symptoms of depression](#) include intense sadness, feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, anxiety, low energy and changes in appetites and with fluctuations.

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These symptoms can be especially hard to deal with at Christmas, when everyone around you seems to be in a good mood. This can make you want to withdraw from other people – which, again, can be difficult during a season of goodwill and catch-ups with loved ones, whatever form they take.

A specific type of depression, known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), is also prevalent during this time of year. Also known as ‘winter depression’ or ‘winter blues’, SAD occurs primarily in the months of December, January and February as a result of people being exposed to less sunlight. It’s estimated that almost a third of people in the UK suffer symptoms of SAD, whilst depression as a whole has also increased over the last decade. Recent depression statistics show that from 2005 to 2015, the total number of people living with depression has increased by 18.4%.

Managing Anxiety over the Holidays: Everything seems to be heightened and more intense at Christmas – from the music and lights to the traffic and crowds. All of the above is daunting for most people but can be even more intense if you struggle with anxiety.

People with social anxiety disorder may find the prospect of having to make an effort to see people, in person or over video, overwhelming. If you struggle with panic disorder, you may find that the intensity and frequency of your panic attacks increase at this time of year. Generalized anxiety disorder, which affects every 6 in 100 according to recent anxiety stats, can mean that all of your usual worries are intensified during the festive period, and you may find that you’re anxious about a huge range of issues, meaning that you’re unable to relax.

If any of the above seem familiar to you, make sure you’re aware of the symptoms of anxiety so you can work to minimize them if a triggering event occurs.

Here are some of the most common signs of anxiety to look out for:

- A persistent sense of worry, apprehension, or dread
- Feeling fearful, paranoid, and tense
- Feeling faint, dizzy, or light-headed
- Increased heartbeat or palpitations

Feeling Stressed at Christmas: There’s no doubt about it; Christmas can be stressful. Cooking, buying presents, keeping children entertained, decorating your home, cleaning up after family gatherings – the list of tasks is endless. For people who struggle with chronic stress, this time of year can be overwhelming and exhausting. It’s something that affects women more than men too. YouGov found that 51% of women have found Christmas to be stressful, compared to 35% of men.

There’s also the added pressure of financial worries and feelings of guilt if you can’t afford to buy your children or loved ones the presents that they really want. Christmas also comes at the end of the year, so if you’ve had an especially difficult one, perhaps with the loss of a job or other financial difficulties throughout the year, this may have added further pressure to the idea of buying presents.

Social media can also play a role in exacerbating your stress during the holiday season, as comparing yourself to others’ seemingly ‘perfect’ Christmas Days can leave you feeling like a failure for not having the best decorations, tree, food or presents.

Overall, the festive season can be a major catalyst for stress, which is why it’s so important to recognize the symptoms as early as possible.

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**REMEMBER... 988
IS HERE TO HELP**

Need immediate emotional support? Call 988 to connect to a counselor who can help. Their specialists provide confidential care 24/7. Because we all need help sometimes.

Visit:
<https://988helpline.org>



**DECEMBER
IS:**

National Stress-Free
Family Holiday
Month

Day:

*World AIDS Day
(Dec. 1)*

*International Day of
Persons With
Disabilities
(Dec. 3)*

*Human Rights Day
(Dec. 10)*

To learn more visit:
<https://sacwellness.com/mental-health-awareness-calendar/?nowprocket=1>



COPING WITH CHRISTMAS: Tips for managing your mental health at Christmas

Thankfully, there are things you can do to manage Christmas stress and any of the mental health pressures you are faced with during the Christmas period. It's important that you don't bottle it up or attempt to ignore your feelings. Instead, you can put some of these tips in place to help you manage symptoms so you can focus on enjoying yourself.

1. Take a break
2. Look after yourself
3. Join the local community
4. Everything in moderation
5. Avoid social comparisons
6. Have realistic expectations
7. Don't look back

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Here are some of the most significant symptoms of stress:

- Anxiety, and a constant sense of worry or dread
- Feeling overwhelmed and as though you have lost control
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Being restless or unable to sit still down

Coping with Loneliness at Christmas: Many of the social pressures of Christmas, fueled by social media and the perception that we have to have an amazing time, can also lead to sense of emptiness or loneliness. We don't even have to be on our own to feel these things. In a Priory survey on the mental health impacts of Christmas on men, we found that 53% of men feel lonely at Christmas – even though they are around other people.

Feelings of loneliness and the mental health issues talked about in this article are very heavily linked. Your loneliness may be a symptom of a mental health problem, or it may become a more serious problem if you don't take steps to try and address your loneliness.

There are self-care strategies for loneliness you can put in place to cope with how you're feeling. Here are a few ideas:

- Start a daily gratitude list: Every day, list five things in your life that you are grateful for or happy about. Focusing on the positives can help to lift your mood and put you on course for a more positive long-term mind set
- Volunteer: Despite what you might think, there is lots going on around your local community at Christmas that doesn't require you to be part of a big family. Volunteering in the community, at a homeless shelter or care home for example, is one of the best ways to connect with other people and boost your confidence
- Be around people: When you're feeling lonely, making plans can be the most difficult thing to try and do. But as social beings, our self-esteem receives a timely boost when we interact with each other. If you feel able to, put some time in with a friend you really value

Loneliness and Bereavement at Christmas: If you've suffered a loss in your family, loneliness can combine with grief to make Christmas an experience that is endured rather than enjoyed. Even with the support of friends and family around you, feelings of isolation, loneliness, and not wanting to do anything, are natural and entirely normal.

Around Christmas time, the constant reminders we see, from Christmas trees in the windows of neighbors to special episodes of our favorite TV shows, only serve as reminders of your loss and bring back feelings of pain.

Be it a recent or long-term loss, there are things you can try to incorporate into your Christmas routine that could help you to navigate through an incredibly tough period:

- Plan your time,
- Say "no",
- Don't feel guilty,
- Ask for help,
- Structure your day, and
- Be kind to yourself.

To read the article visit: [Christmas and Mental Health | Coping at Christmas | Priory \(priorygroup.com\)](https://www.priorygroup.com/Christmas-and-Mental-Health-Coping-at-Christmas)



Dear Valued Referral Sources,

The holidays are coming, so there is nothing more important than maintaining your health as much as possible. We just wanted to take this time to wish you a Happy Holiday Season and a Wonderful New Year! Thank you for your referrals!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Campbell, MSW, LSW

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Greene County Crisis Line: 1-800-417-9460
Washington County 24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 1-877-225-3567
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 **or** 1-800-273-8255
Greenbriar Treatment Facility: 1-800-637-4673
STTARS Sexual Assault Hotline (Greene & Washington): 1-888-480-7283