

Wellbeing at Christmas



Christmas is heralded as a time for loving, giving and peace. Although it is a Christian celebration it has come to have different meanings for people, irrespective of their faith and beliefs. Traditionally it is a time to spend with family, whether that is our biological family or our family of close friends. We may be nostalgic about childhood memories - discovering presents under the tree, nativity plays and the proverbial white Christmas. As well as remembering the good times it can also be a reminder of those who are no longer with us, and for some it can be a lonely time. Christmas has become increasingly commercialised with decorations and powerful advertising appearing earlier every year. With so much hype and images of the ideal

Christmas surrounding us we can easily feel under pressure to create the perfect day. Before we know it we are worn out with planning and our finances have been pushed to the brink. Whatever Christmas means to you, whether you look forward to it with joy, trepidation or simply wait for it all to be over, we offer our thoughts on how to make the most of the Christmas season.

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Health

Our health often takes a battering at Christmas time as we are faced with so much temptation - mince pies, delicious treats, Christmas parties to name a few. It is a time when we tend to be less active, opting to watch Christmas movies instead of spending time outdoors. While it is wonderful to savour these things it is important to remember to take care of our health and avoid falling victim to the Christmas slump.

- ▶ **Exercise** – Staying active during winter will help you to improve energy levels, mood, overall fitness and health. There is some great winter exercise wear that can help you to adapt to the cooler conditions if you prefer outdoor activity such as cycling or running, or you can switch to an indoor activity such as yoga, zumba or swimming. If that feels too much just getting outside for a 20 minute walk each day can give you a boost.
- ▶ **Diet** – Keep your diet balanced by having healthy snacks on hand such as nuts, fruit or dips like hummus. This can help to prevent you from overindulging on some of the richer food available. Know when you have had enough and feel full, you can always save some for later when you feel hungry again. Follow the 80:20 rule. If you maintain a healthy diet 80% of the time then you can enjoy some of the delicious treats too.

- ▶ **Alcohol** – NHS guidelines suggest that men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units per day and women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units per day. The best way to avoid hangovers is to drink sensibly and know what your body can cope with. Most of the symptoms of a hangover are related to dehydration as alcohol is a diuretic and removes fluid from the body. If, however, you know you are going out for a big night and anticipate that you may drink more heavily than usual then these tips may help:
 - Never go drinking on an empty stomach. Before you go out have a meal that includes carbohydrates (such as pasta or rice) as this will help to slow down the body's absorption of alcohol.
 - Stay hydrated. Alternate alcoholic drinks with drinks of water or non-fizzy soft drinks.
 - Drink a pint of water before you go to sleep and keep a glass of water by the bed in case you are thirsty during the night.
 - Have a healthy morning after breakfast. Eggs are an excellent choice because they provide choline, a nutrient that supports the liver. Tomatoes provide vitamin C and mushrooms have energising B vitamins. If you cannot face breakfast have a nutrient rich fruit smoothie instead
 - 'Hair of the dog', or drinking more in order to combat the symptoms of a hangover, is risky and may simply delay the appearance of symptoms until the alcohol wears off again. Doctors advise waiting 48 hours before drinking again to allow your body tissues to recover.



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Money

- ▶ Think in terms of what you can afford rather than what you desire.
- ▶ Decide who you really need to buy gifts for and whether there are any you can eliminate. This doesn't mean neglecting your loved ones but re-evaluating the circle of people that you give to. For instance, ask yourself if you really need to buy gifts for all your in-laws or expensive gifts for teachers? You might agree with your in-laws that you forgo presents this year, or that you give gifts to the children but not the adults. Others find it helpful to set a budget of £5 or £10, or to organise a Secret Santa amongst a group of you so that you reduce the overall number of gifts you have to buy.
- ▶ Home-made presents are often appreciated – baked goods, pictures by children or vouchers of promises such as massages or a day out.
- ▶ If you want to buy big tickets items like a TV or games console it can be worth waiting. You can give the children a nicely wrapped IOU and get it in the sales.
- ▶ If you are spending Christmas day with family or friends see if you can share the costs. For instance if you are buying the food perhaps someone else could buy the wine, cheese or crackers.
- ▶ Think about what normally gets thrown away and only buy what will realistically be eaten. Remember that the shops are not closed for long so there is no need to overstuff the fridge and cupboard.
- ▶ Most supermarkets do great basic own brand ranges of food that do very well in taste tests. If you are planning a big shop you can go to MySupermarket to compare prices.

Relationships

Although the festive season is known as the season of goodwill in reality it can be chaotic and highlight strains in some relationships. It may be the one time in the year when we spend time with relatives and others who hold very different opinions to ourselves. If you are concerned it can be helpful to think ahead about how best to manage.

- ▶ Make the most of Christmas by choosing to spend time with people you enjoy being around and make you feel good.
- ▶ If you have to spend time with people you do not get along with try to put bad feelings aside for the day and leave arguments for another time. Try to avoid sitting next to them during dinner.
- ▶ Don't expect miracles. If certain people have a habit of bickering or being critical it is unlikely they will change just for Christmas. If things feel overwhelming or you find yourself getting upset or angry take some out; go for a walk, phone a friend or have some alone time.
- ▶ If you are spending Christmas day with family or friends see if you can share the costs. For instance if you are buying the food perhaps someone else could buy the wine, cheese or crackers.
- ▶ Avoid triggers such as too much alcohol or sensitive subjects such as politics or whose responsibility it is to look after Great Grandma.
- ▶ Plan fun things to do. Arguments are less likely to happen if people are involved in an activity such as an after dinner board game, or playing football in the garden.
- ▶ If you know somebody who is on their own for Christmas it can mean a lot to them if you get in touch, whether it is a simple phone call or an invitation to come over for a mince pie.

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Work

- ▶ Do your best to clear your desk of important tasks before you leave for the Christmas break so that you won't be worrying about them. Set up an out of office reply and voice mail and remember that most of your clients and suppliers will be taking a break too. Then you can relax and enjoy some time without being bothered by emails and phone calls.
- ▶ Christmas parties can be great fun but remember that you still have to work with your colleagues once the fun is over. Know your alcohol limits, and if you have a tendency to drink too much and lose your inhibitions book a cab in advance so that you leave before things get too messy. Be measured about what you share with others; it is not the time or place to air your gripes with your manager, spread gossip or divulge personal secrets.

Christmas on your own

- ▶ If you find yourself on your own for Christmas there are many things you can do to make it special. Plan to spend time doing things that make you happy whether it is country walking, watching a favourite movie or travelling. There are numerous travel companies that cater for single people and many have specific Christmas deals. Christmas is a great time to be sociable but if you feel lonely it can be helpful to speak to a friend or family member. Organisations such as Mind and Samaritans have befriending services or offer support over the phone.

