



12 Days of Mental Wellness

The holidays are not always a happy, jolly time – in fact, for many of us, this time of year can be challenging. This holiday season may also feel different to what we are used to as COVID-19 has affected us all in some way. We hope these tips from Lifeline may be of help in looking after yourself or those you love at this time. No matter where you are these holidays – Lifeline is here for you.



#1 Acknowledge and accept your feelings

After two years of dealing with the effects of COVID-19, we may get to this holiday season feeling a mixture of emotions: exhausted, sad, angry, excited, happy or hopeful. All of this is normal.

It's important to acknowledge whatever we are feeling, because it can help us make sense of our experience and actions. If possible, try to accept the feelings without judgement, as putting pressure on ourselves to change our feelings can sometimes cause more stress than the feelings themselves.

Over the past two years, many of us have been coping, rather than thriving and that is okay. Adjusting our expectations for this holiday season and giving ourselves a break may help. Remember, we are all doing the best we can.

#2 Make space for grief & loss

Holidays and special occasions can intensify feelings of grief or loss and be a painful reminder of what we no longer have, whether that be a loved one, employment, relationships, the ability to plan for the future or engage in enjoyable activities. This is a natural response to any type of loss and helps in the process of healing. You might find some of these ideas helpful:

- * **CREATE A NEW TRADITION**
- * **HONOUR YOUR LOSS** in whatever way feels right for you
- * **REDUCE PRESSURE TO 'CELEBRATE'** and instead, tune into what you need
- * **SHARE YOUR FEELINGS** with someone or try journaling
- * **HELP OTHERS IN NEED** if you can – it can shift perspective

#3 Take time out for you

You know that saying 'you can't pour from an empty cup'? We often get so caught up with preparation and plans for the holiday season, or even with looking after other people, that we forget to take time out for ourselves. The holiday season should include periods of rest, relaxation and reflection as we prepare for the start of a new year. Take time to engage in activities you enjoy, find relaxing or fun. Start small – it makes a difference.

#4 Recognise your signs of stress & anxiety

WHETHER IT'S ORGANISING GIFTS AND GET-TOGETHERS

or feeling pressured by constant reminders of the holidays, stress and anxiety can increase around this time of year. We all experience this differently. It can be helpful to listen to the signals our body is giving us to alert us that something is not quite right. It could be a fast heart rate, headaches, an upset stomach, feeling more irritable than usual or changes in sleep patterns.

Take the signals as an opportunity to try different strategies: distract yourself with enjoyable, low stress activities; talk to someone you trust; try some breathing or meditation; take a walk or do some exercise. Try experimenting and see what works best for you!



FESTIVE SEASON LOADING...



#5 Set & maintain positive boundaries

Setting holiday boundaries is so important for health and wellbeing. Boundaries look different for everyone but may include saying no to people's requests, declining holiday invitations or house guests, or taking on fewer responsibilities. It's important to be direct and clear about boundaries with others ahead of time so they have time to adjust their expectations. This can be done in a firm but kind way.

When you first set boundaries, you might feel uncomfortable because you don't want to upset or disappoint anyone. However, this feeling is completely normal - it can be helpful to remind yourself that your needs are just as important as other people's needs.

#6 Make a holiday budget that works for you

The holiday season can be financially stressful as people often feel under pressure to spend money on gifts, gatherings and food. It may be helpful to create a budget to see what is within your financial means over this period.

Think about low cost ways to tackle the holiday season. Suggest a Secret Santa/Kris Kringle or another gift exchange with a spending limit. Give a voucher of your time as a gift, such as helping someone with DIY, gardening or babysitting. Get creative in the kitchen by baking a cake, bread or chutney. And instead of spending money at a restaurant, consider a BBQ (restrictions permitting) where everyone can bring a dish.

#7 Focus on giving

The act of giving to others releases chemicals in our brains that make us feel happier and more socially connected. You might want to give some of your time, give someone a helping hand, or give a stranger a smile and holiday greeting. Certain acts of giving, like volunteering, can also provide opportunities for social interactions.

* **HINT** visit [Volunteering Australia](#) for lots of opportunities!

#8 Get back to body basics

WE ALL KNOW that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be difficult over the festive season! It can feel great to indulge a little over this period; just remember that balance and moderation is key. What we eat and drink can really affect how we feel. Here are a few tips to help you feel good:

- * **TRY TO EAT** nutritious and non-processed food
- * **TRY TO AVOID** or moderate the use of alcohol and other drugs (including caffeine) as this can affect our mood and mental health
- * **MOVE YOUR BODY.** Get creative – think of skipping, cycling, dancing, a nature walk or backyard games
- * **MAINTAIN A REGULAR SLEEP PATTERN** and aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night
- * **STAY HYDRATED.** Aim for about eight glasses of water a day, as our organs need water to function properly.
- * **HINT** visit <https://fundraise.lifeline.org.au/be-active-be-the-answer> for some suggestions on ways to stay active over the summer



#9 Practice gratitude

Taking stock of what we're grateful for changes how our brains are wired. Over time, it has been shown to increase happiness, reduce stress and improve our ability to deal with challenging situations.

Gratitude helps us focus on what we have rather than what we don't, helping to concentrate on the good experiences in life. People can feel and express gratitude in various ways.

You may want to keep a gratitude journal, mentally thank someone, or just connect with the good things in your life and keep these at the forefront of your mind. This exercise is called 'practice gratitude' as it really does take practice! So try your best to stick with it and you'll see the benefits over time.

#10 Connect to combat loneliness

If you feel lonely, you are not alone! In fact, around 1 in 4 Australians say they are currently experiencing loneliness. This feeling often increases during the holiday season, when there

may be a mismatch between the amount of social connection we have compared to the amount we want. This year, feelings of loneliness might increase due to the added complexity of the pandemic restrictions. Some things that might help to reduce feelings of loneliness include:

- * **AVOID COMPARISON** comparing ourselves to others can often make us feel less than other people
- * **START A CONVERSATION** unexpected moments of connection can improve our mood. A simple hello can go a long way.
- * **BE KIND TO OTHERS** offering help or support can help us build meaningful connections
- * **RECONNECT** we can all lose touch with friends over time, but it is never too late to reach out
- * **SET A DAILY ROUTINE** make sure to include meaningful tasks, enjoyable activities and creative endeavours
- * **STAY ACTIVE** exercise releases hormones which increases feelings of happiness
- * **LEARN SOMETHING NEW OR TRY A NEW HOBBY** you could even consider joining a club, organisation or online community.

#11 Have realistic relationship expectations

THE FESTIVE SEASON can be an exciting time for family and friends to get together, but it can put extra strain on relationships and highlight tension. Increased responsibilities and expectations can also increase conflict. Some things that may help:

- * **SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.** If certain family members don't get along during the year, it is unlikely they will during the holidays
- * **USE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES,** such as deep breathing, to cope with tension
- * **AVOID KNOWN TRIGGERS.** For example, if you know that a certain subject is a sore point, you might want to distract and move on to another topic
- * **TRY TO REMEMBER** that alcohol and other drugs can make things worse in the short and long term.



#12

Remember you're not alone

WHETHER IT'S 3AM ON CHRISTMAS DAY, or 11pm New Year's Eve, Lifeline is open every day and night of the year ready to listen and support you. Reach out for help if you need it.

If you or someone you know needs crisis support, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 (available 24-7); text 0477 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp. If life is in danger, call 000.