

# Christmas Stress? Tips To Help You Get Back Your Zest!

As the summer sun comes alive, the Aussie BBQ's fire up, and our holidays by the salty sea air draw closer, we can start to hear the faint jingle of Christmas bells ringing, laughter and joy spreading throughout our homes and communities, and Rudolph classics being played on our small screens. The arrival of December sees children anticipating the toys they will receive from Santa; grown-ups looking forward to a much deserved break to connect with family and friends, and endless Christmas parties on warm balmy nights.

For many, Christmas is the time of year that brings joy and happiness. It brings people together – families, friends, and work colleagues – all celebrating connectedness, the beautiful food we indulge in and precious gifts – both given and received. However, amongst all the laughter, joy, and excitement; sadness, sorrow, and fear can also arise. Triggered by stressors such as financial burdens, job insecurity, time, and family and relationship issues – these stressors can seem like intensive black clouds to some people; particularly intensified at this time of year.

Stress can have detrimental impacts on our mind and body; some of which may include disturbed sleep, weight loss or weight gain, irrational behaviour, and physical complaints, just to name a few. These impacts can be different for everybody, and so is the way we deal with these stressors. Our reactions and the choices we make in relation to these stressors are significant to future outcomes, and it is our thoughts and attitudes that determine this.

Our thoughts and attitudes decide how we will respond to the stressors; they govern our behaviours, our moods, and our ability to cope - and they are the primary foundation for building our health. When our thoughts and attitudes are negative or out of balance, everything else is too. Our physical health, our motivation, our zest for work and life, and the network of people close to us - all impacted by our mindset and approach to the stressors. It's called the ripple effect - impact one thing, and impact all.

As a consequence of the ripple effect, we can feel stressed, out of balance, and not ourselves. No one likes feeling this way, especially during the festive season. So, what are the things can we do to feel empowered at Christmas time, bring stability and harmony back into our lives, and optimise our health and wellbeing to experience each day with energy and vitality? Outlined below are helpful tips (some based on scientific research) that will empower you to take control of your stressors and your health and wellbeing.

**Lean on your support network.** Talking it out with someone you feel comfortable with can help to alleviate some of the feelings and emotions you are experiencing. Often, having an objective view from someone else can help you to see things from a different perspective which can positively affect your approach to the stressor.

**Practice gratitude daily.** Research has shown that by thinking of all the things you are grateful for we can improve our mood and act as a buffer against negative emotions. At the end of each day, write down 3 things you were grateful for during the day, and notice the effects this has on you. Your gratefuls might be having a coffee with your colleague, the warmth of the sun on your face – anything you experience that you were grateful and appreciative of. It's often the small things that count the most.



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**Practice deep abdominal breathing.** By closing your eyes, taking a deep breath in through your nose, feeling your tummy contract and your chest expand, and then sighing out through your mouth, the parasympathetic branch of your nervous system will become activated– the part of your nervous system responsible for stimulating the relaxation response and counteracting any stress and adrenaline coursing throughout your body.

**Budget.** If finances are a huge stressor for you, a great way to determine your income and spendings ratio is with a budget spreadsheet. Knowing what bills are due, what presents you need to buy, and what your expenses are at this time of year can help you to prioritise where your money needs to be spent.

**Take time out for you.** What activities make you feel good? What is it that brings you peace, serenity, and fulfilment? It could be as simple as reading a book in your favourite chair, taking your dog for a walk, or having a coffee with a friend. Engage in these activities regularly and do something for you, noticing how this makes you feel afterwards.

**Engage in daily mindfulness.** When you are in the midst of an activity (anything from going for a walk, washing the dishes, taking public transport, brushing your teeth) how often are you distracted by your endless thoughts about what you're going to cook for dinner, what time you have to pick the kids up, or the multitude of things you need to do when you get home? By grounding yourself in the present moment of your activity; e.g., noticing the air on your face when you're outside for a walk, feeling the soap suds on your hands when washing up, noticing how your toothbrush feels against your teeth and your gums – we are actively engaging our senses and paying attention to what is going on for us in a non-judgemental way. This practice can actually change the structure of our brains to become a happier, more caring person, which ultimately improves our overall health and wellbeing. One of the best apps on the market that teaches mindfulness is Smiling Mind – a fantastic app for all ages and one that can be accustomed to your needs.

Christmas is a time for reflection of the year that was, a time for beautiful food, family, and friends, and a time when if we take care of ourselves by integrating small changes throughout our day to experience happiness, laughter, and joy, it can be the magical and stress free time of year intended.

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### References

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