

# Happy Holidays

## Key Points

- Christmas and the Holiday Season can present stresses around time and money as we try to balance work and life pressures
- Buying gifts for family members, friends and workmates can add to financial stresses
- Tensions between family members and/ or friends can be exacerbated as people come together to celebrate
- The emotional impacts around the loss of loved ones or close friends can be overwhelming at this time of year
- Our eagerness to celebrate can lead to physical and emotional impacts from overeating and/ or consuming too much alcohol
- We need to have strategies in place to minimise and manage stresses over Christmas and the Holiday Season

Can you believe there's just a few weeks until Christmas? The last few weeks of the year are times of celebration when we get together with friends and family to reflect on the year that was and to look forward to the year that is coming. It is also the time when we wind down from work and head away on holidays to enjoy the sun and the company of friends and loved ones. With all these pluses, how is it that the holidays can also be a time of stress?

Are you feeling stressed or anxious about the holidays? If you are feeling this way, it is important to know that you are not alone. Data from a 2015 Relationships Australia survey showed that:

- Around one-third of men and women stated that their family relationships were highly negatively affected at Christmas due to work-life balance issues
- One-third of people responding to the survey reported that their family relationships were highly negatively affected due to financial worries at Christmas
- Around 16 per cent of men and women reported that their family relationships were highly negatively affected by the increased consumption of food, drugs, alcohol or the increased incidence of gambling at Christmas
- Around 16 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men reported their family relationships were highly affected by different expectations, beliefs or values around Christmas

## Getting back to happy holidays

Too many Australians are facing emotional and mental health stresses during the holiday period. Let's take a look at ways you can get back to happy holidays by:

- Managing budgets and money stresses
- Minimising or coping with family conflicts
- Remembering loved ones, and
- Managing our holiday diet

## Managing budgets and money stresses

When we talk with older relatives or friends about how they celebrated Christmas and the Holiday Season when they were growing up, few seem to focus on giving and receiving gifts. Instead, they often share stories of how their families made this time special, about how they enjoyed spending time together or about the origins of family traditions to mark the holidays. You will also likely hear stories about holiday adventures with friends, time spent at the beach or local swimming pool or road trips to the coast...

But, in more modern times Christmas has also focused on spending money on gifts for loved ones, friends and acquaintances, rather than spending time with loved ones. There are also significant costs associated with hosting Christmas Day lunch or other holiday parties, travel and accommodation, as well as New Year's Eve celebrations.

The end of the year means time away from work and you may not always be paid for this time (for example if you have time off without pay).

Some tips for managing your budget at the end of the year:

- Make a list of who you will buy Christmas/ holiday gifts for. Look over the list multiple times and consider if you really need to purchase a gift for each person on the list
- Set limits around who receives Christmas/ holiday gifts. For example, consider only giving gifts to children under the age of 10
- Consider purchasing one gift for a family, rather than buying a gift for each member of that family

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- Manage expenses by agreeing to a spending limit/ recommended price limit to minimise the costs of purchasing gifts
- Ask each person attending your holiday meal to prepare a dish so that you don't have to purchase and cook all the food for the family gathering

## Minimising or coping with family conflicts

There's an old saying that goes like this: "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family". Many families have members that don't speak to each other, often for reasons that no one can remember after all this time. Alternatively, the stresses and pressures of the end of the year can spark arguments when one person or part of the family perceives that they are contributing more energy, effort or money into holiday celebrations than others.

You can manage the pressures around family relationships by accepting that:

- If certain family members have been bickering or arguing through the year, their conflict is not going to simply vanish because of the Holidays
- Certain triggers need to be avoided, for example stay away from discussing divisive matters like politics or past arguments. If these discussions begin, use distractions to change the subject
- Get everyone involved in activities after the meal, such as playing sports together or watching old family movies. Keeping people active and engaged minimises opportunities for arguments to arise

## Remembering loved ones

A significant contribution to Holiday Season stress can be the emotional impact of missing loved ones who have passed away or celebrating without family members or friends who are ill.

This stress and these emotions can be overwhelming, especially if this is the first Christmas you are celebrating after your loved one has passed away. You will be missing this person deeply and will be wishing for the ability to spend this time together.

Sharing your emotions by talking about your feelings with family and friends can help. Sometimes sharing happy stories and memories can assist you with getting through the pain of missing loved ones.

Another way you can remember loved ones is by setting aside some time for yourself to reflect on your loss, on recalling memories of your loved one, to look at photos or videos of the person you are missing. Rekindling these memories can help you to feel closer to your loved ones when they are not with you.

## Managing your holiday diet

Eating wonderful food and drinking alcohol are both parts of celebrating Christmas, the holidays and the New Year. But, overindulging can lead to repercussions. Paying particular notice to managing your alcohol consumption can minimise stresses and conflicts.

Drinking copious amounts of alcohol can lead to lowered inhibitions and this could lead to family members making comments that they would otherwise not usually make, at least not in public which could spark conflict.

People may look to alcohol to help cope with the stress of the holidays. It is important to remember that turning to alcohol (or drugs) to manage stress is a very short term 'solution' that essentially swaps one problem for another without dealing with the initial causes or consequences of the stress.

## Happy holidays!

If the Christmas/ New Year/ Holiday period is a time when you typically experience additional stresses or anxieties, seek help before you are overwhelmed. This can include having strategies in place to minimise stresses in the first place, as well as having 'backup plans' to help when things become difficult

If you are experiencing stress or anxiety, Converge International is there for you every day of the holidays. You can reach our counsellors any time by calling **1300 687 327 (1300 OUR EAP)**. You can find out more about the Converge International EAP at [www.convergeinternational.com.au](http://www.convergeinternational.com.au)



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