



Employee
Assistance
Programme



EAP Newsletter

The winter health edition

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Making People Better

The winter health edition

In this month's newsletter we talk about health-boosting tips for the winter, loneliness during the holidays, managing festivities after a bereavement and financial stress.

This newsletter includes information about sensitive and potentially triggering topics.

10 health-boosting tips for the winter

There are many reasons our health takes a backseat during the winter months. Work and family schedules can feel pretty overwhelming in the lead up to the holiday season and it's also the time that flu, winter colds and other bugs put a damper on our mood and physical wellbeing.

There's no denying that finding ways to remain healthy and strong during the winter can be tricky. The key is to get ahead now to try and prevent winter illness taking over.

Take a look at these 10, health-boosting tips from our mental and physical health experts:



1. Eat seasonal fruit and vegetables

Eating seasonally can be a great source of nutrients. Many winter foods are higher in vitamin C, which can help fight seasonal colds and other illnesses, and maintain energy levels.



2. Get enough sleep

Many of us will feel a need to sleep more in the winter. Many researchers agree that this is likely associated with the amount of light we're exposed to. Aim for around eight hours of quality sleep per night and maintain a consistent sleep schedule. Adequate sleep is essential for a strong immune system.



3. Stay hydrated

We're much less thirsty in the winter which means we often drink less than during spring and summer. However dehydration can have a negative impact on our overall health and wellbeing. Make an extra effort to stay hydrated this winter with plenty of water, herbal teas and other warm drinks.



4. Eat nutrient rich comfort foods

We often feel hungrier and crave comfort foods in the winter. It's little wonder because these foods provide a sense of warmth and cosiness. Get creative with your cooking and opt for homemade comfort foods that are high in nutrients such as soups and stews.



5. Take a vitamin D supplement

It's difficult to get enough vitamin D from the sun and food in the winter so the government suggests taking a vitamin D supplement during this time. Vitamin D helps to regulate the amount of calcium and phosphate in the body - the nutrients needed to keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy.



6. Get moving and keep active

One of the great benefits of moving and exercising in the winter is that your immune system will work harder to defend itself against the elements and, in turn, helps your body fight off infections. Although it can be tempting to hibernate during the winter months, regular physical exercise is crucial for maintaining overall health.



7. Look after your skin

Cold weather and heating can cause skin to become dry, flaky or crack. This can lead to eczema or other skin conditions. Moisturise your skin with lotion every day and use sunscreen if you're spending time in direct sunlight.



8. Keep your brain engaged

With shorter and colder days, you may find yourself feeling more irritable, having low energy or even struggling with your daily routine. Keeping your brain engaged will help with motivation, leading you to feel happier and healthier.



9. Stay connected

Research has proven that having a support system and maintaining social interaction can be beneficial in reducing negative mental health symptoms. It's even more important to be proactive with your connections in the winter when it can be harder to socialise and easier to stay indoors.



10. Be kind to yourself

Winter is a great time to adjust your lifestyle towards relaxation and self-care. There are plenty of obligations that press us for our limited time and energy. Allow yourself to say no to unnecessary commitments and set boundaries that support better mental health.

Seven stress-busting strategies to try in December

The winter months can bring about increased stress due to holidays, packed social schedules and reduced daylight hours. Try these six stress management techniques to help manage stress during the winter months:

Deep breathe to calm your nervous system: Inhale slowly through your nose, hold your breath for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat several times.

Progressive muscle relaxation: Tense and then release each muscle group in your body starting from your toes and working your way up to your head. This helps to release muscle tension.

Mindfulness meditation to stay present and release anxiety: Focus on your breath, or a specific object while letting go of intrusive thoughts.

Journalling: Write down your thoughts and feelings in a journal. This can help you gain clarity, process emotions, and reduce stress.

Listen to music: Listen to calming music or sounds to help relax your mind.

Dedicate time to hobbies and interests: Engage in activities you enjoy and are passionate about. Doing things you love can take your mind off stressors.

Immerse yourself in nature and fresh air: Spending time in nature and getting fresh air can have a calming and grounding effect on your mood.

Combating loneliness during the holidays



Did you know...

Last year **1.3 million** older people expected they'd feel lonely at Christmas*

5 million older people say a phone call from a friend or loved one would help them this Christmas time*

More than a third of people are too embarrassed to admit they are lonely at Christmas**

45% of adults feel 'occasionally', 'sometimes' or 'often' lonely in England***

*Age UK, 2022 ** Mind, 2017 *** Campaign to End Loneliness



Nine ways to ward off loneliness

Whatever your setup around the festive season is, it's possible that feelings of loneliness will come in at some point.

It's not unusual that the focus and pressure on togetherness and merriment at this time of the year can trigger negative emotions, particularly for those who live or work alone.

Our mental health experts have shared their advice on how you can manage feelings of loneliness during this time:



1. Acknowledge your feelings

Know that it's OK to feel lonely. Recognise and accept your feelings without judging yourself.



2. Keep a routine

Creating a routine and maintaining it will help to give you certainty at a time when things may feel out of control.



3. Use breathing techniques throughout the day

Simple breathing techniques help to keep you grounded and reduce anxiety caused by uncertainty.



4. Intentionally choose activities that bring you joy

Activities could include anything from putting great music on whilst you cook or picking up a coffee before you start work one morning.



5. Take a break from social media

It can be triggering to see families and loved-ones together during the holidays on social media, not just for those who are alone but also those whose setup doesn't match the ideals we often see online.



6. Create traditions

Start new holiday traditions yourself. These can be as simple as watching your favourite movie, baking, or heading to a Christmas market.



7. Step outdoors

Movement can be a great way to interrupt negative thinking. Step outdoors and connect with the community around you - whether that's going for a walk, heading to the local coffee shop or popping round to a neighbour's house.



8. Volunteer on key holiday dates

You may find a sense of enrichment by volunteering. Helping others isn't just beneficial to those who receive the support, but it's beneficial to the giver, too. Helping others can provide a sense of purpose and connection.



9. Ask for help

If loneliness is causing significant distress or impacting your mental health, consider talking to a therapist or counsellor who can provide support and guidance.

Don't suffer in silence. Experts are out there to support you

It can be really tricky to ask for help but it's important to know there are experts and charities out there to support you during this time:

Mind

mental health charity offering information and signposting service via its infoline – call 0300 123 3393 or visit www.mind.org.uk

Samaritans

whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you. The Samaritans are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – call 116 123 or visit www.samaritans.org

Common signs of loneliness to look out for in others

Although loneliness is a common and normal human experience, it can be incredibly hard for someone to admit that they're feeling lonely.

With that in mind, it's helpful for us all to understand the signs of loneliness so we can support friends, family and colleagues when they need it.

Here are some common signals to look out for that may suggest someone is lonely:



They are engaging in risky behaviour such as alcohol or drug misuse



They spend a lot of time on their own



They seem unproductive



They seem to have lost joy in activities



They often dwell on the negatives



They don't respond to messages or answer calls



They are lacking motivation and have difficulty concentrating.

How to support someone who you think may be lonely

If you think someone is lonely, there are many ways you can help them to ease some of those feelings:

1/ Reach out

If you know someone who may be feeling lonely, try to reach out and check in on them. A simple message or phone call can make such a big difference.

2/ Offer supportive listening

Sometimes all someone needs is someone to listen. Be an empathic and non-judgemental ear for them to share their feelings. Often simply knowing there is someone there to listen can bring relief to the person.

3/ Invite them to join you

If it's feasible, invite them to join your holiday celebrations or gatherings, even if it's virtually. Inclusivity can go a long way in making someone feel valued.

4/ Provide resources

Share resources like befriending services, helplines, mental health services or local support groups if they are open to seeking support.

5/ Respect their boundaries

Be mindful that not everyone may want to participate in festivities or social events. Respect their boundaries and offer support in a way that feels comfortable for them.

6/ Send a thoughtful gift

Consider sending them a thoughtful, personalised gift or card to let them know you are thinking of them.

7/ Be patient and persistent

Loneliness can be difficult to overcome, so be patient and persistent in your efforts to support someone. Loneliness often takes time to alleviate.

How to manage the festive season after a bereavement





Seven coping strategies to help you navigate celebrations without your loved one

When you're grieving, the thought of celebrating and joining in with activities can feel really overwhelming. In fact, finding the right way to celebrate without your family member or friend there can be even more difficult.

We've gathered some coping strategies from our mental health experts that may help you navigate Christmas without your loved one this year:



Put time aside ahead of the holidays to reflect on the ways you would like to celebrate

There is no one way to deal with grief. It is very individual and can impact people in different ways. Consider whether it would be important for you to keep the usual traditions and pay tribute to the person who died, or if you think it would be more beneficial to do something different. Planning this ahead of time can help to avoid the overwhelm of the occasion when it arrives.



Notice when others are pressuring you to do something you don't want

You may find that people are pressuring you to celebrate in a way that doesn't feel quite right to you. The important thing is to celebrate - if you'd like to - in a way that is comfortable for you. Don't feel afraid to say no.



Bring focus to the things they enjoyed

Often it's the physicality of the person who's died that feels the most difficult at this time. Try 'speaking' to the person - either out loud or silently - if they have one, visit their grave or a place that was special to them. Bringing a focus to the things they enjoyed, the music they played or the food they loved may help you to feel they are included.



Talk with friends and family

Speak with friends and family about how they might like to mark the occasion. Sharing ideas might help to bring you together, whilst being sensitive to each other's feelings at this time.



Look after your mental health

Changes to your usual routine during the holidays can have an impact on mental health. Ensure you're getting adequate sleep and eating regular meals. Try to avoid the temptation to mask feelings with alcohol and drugs. Although this may give you short relief, alcohol is a depressant and drinking may lead to spiralling negative emotions.



Find positive distractions

Be proactive in organising things that bring you joy with significant friends and family members. Simply going for a walk, watching a movie at home or cooking together can give you the support and connection you need.



Talk

Grieving during the festive season can be an isolating time. Your circle of family or friends might not know what support you need. If you feel able, let them know that you're finding this to be a difficult time and the support you'd like from them.

There are also a number of charities that specialise in bereavement and can help during this time, including:

- Cruse Bereavement Support
- call 0808 808 1677 or visit www.cruse.org.uk
- Bereaved through Alcohol and Drugs (BEAD) - visit www.beadproject.org.uk
- At a Loss - the UK's signposting website for the bereaved - visit www.ataloss.org



Stressed about finances?

With the rising cost of living and changes to the benefits system, many of us are worried about money. The worries can feel even more overwhelming during the winter months as household bills tend to rise and the festive season approaches.

Like any source of overwhelming stress, financial problems can take a big toll on mental and physical health.



How financial stress impacts the mind and body

Feeling beaten down by money worries can adversely impact:



Sleep



Energy levels



Self-esteem

Leave you feeling:



Angry



Ashamed



Fearful

And also:



Fuel tension and arguments with those closest to you



Exacerbate pain



Trigger mood swings



Increase your risk of depression and anxiety.

Dealing with the financial pressures of the festive period

Resolving financial problems tends to involve small steps that reap rewards over time. In the current economic climate, it's unlikely your financial difficulties will disappear overnight. But that doesn't mean you can't bring in small changes now to ease your stress levels over the holiday season.

Here are five ways you can reduce the personal and financial stresses of the big day.

1/ Manage expectations

Know that younger children don't need expensive toys and outings. What they really want is to spend time with you and to feel loved and secure. The best way to have a guilt-free Christmas is to take some time before the hustle and bustle to think through what matters the most.

2/ Work out a budget now and stick to it

Don't plan your 'perfect' Christmas before knowing the budget you have to work with. Set a budget first and then make plans around that. Planning before you've worked out your finances may lead to disappointment or debt.

3/ Discuss the plan for presents with friends and family

Over 32 million Brits receive gifts they do not want, worth some £1.2 billion combined*. If you haven't already, now's a good time to talk with friends and family about ditching unnecessary presents, setting budgets, or sharing wishlists to avoid unwanted gifts.

4/ Make some cash by selling things you don't want anymore

Take a look around - is there anything you see that you haven't used since last Christmas (or simply forgot you had)? You can sell just about anything and everything online and it's a great way to make some money to put towards your festive celebrations.

5/ Suggest free or cheap activities

Festive events can cost a lot of money but there's plenty of things you can do that are cheap or even free. You could arrange a winter walk with friends and ask everyone to bring a sweet treat and a flask of tea or coffee, or organise a group craft session where you make Christmas cards or build wreaths from foliage you've found outside.

*Finder

Access FREE financial advice today

If you're feeling overwhelmed by financial stress, know that professional help is available for you to lean on.

Free financial support is available via the following organisations and charities:

Citizens Advice Bureau

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

for advice on dealing with debt, bailiffs, bankruptcy, pensions, tax and more

StepChange

www.stepchange.org

for debt advice and support

National Debtline

www.nationaldebtline.org

for debt advice and support including emergency advice if you are at immediate risk of losing your home, essential services or goods, such as your car.



Our tip of the month

The one thing we ask you to do today if you do nothing else...

Don't neglect yourself.

The festive period can be a very busy and stressful time for some of us. Build a routine where things feel more manageable, make time for exercise, try to eat healthy and stay connected to the people and organisations that can support you. Over time, this will help to improve your energy levels and build your resilience to better deal with the pressures and challenges of life.

SilverCloud Programmes on the Wellbeing Hub

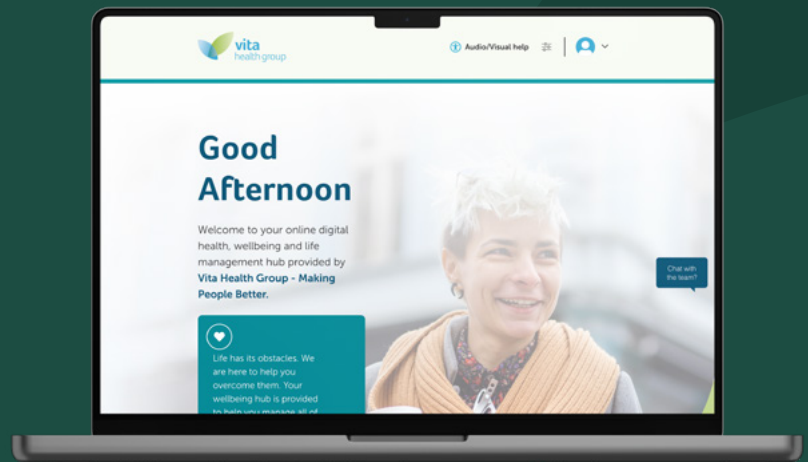


Visit our Wellbeing Hub by scanning the QR code above:

A new way to a healthier mind

1 in 4 of us struggle with mental health challenges, like feeling low or anxious.

SilverCloud programmes provide the tools and skills to feel better and stay better, helping you to improve and maintain your wellbeing by addressing underlying issues that can have a negative impact on how you would like to live your life.



What programmes are available?

Wellbeing

Programmes that give you the skills to deal with everyday issues that affect your emotional health.

Mental Health

Programmes to help alleviate the symptoms of common mental health conditions.

Chronic Health

Programmes that focus on the mental health aspects of living with a long term condition.

New programmes

- Space from Anxiety
- Bipolar toolkit

Based on years of clinical research, the programmes are interactive and delivered via a user-friendly platform. Programme modules are easy to use. Work through the activities, videos and content anytime on your computer, tablet, or phone.

Visit your Wellbeing Hub

Digital Wellbeing Programmes, free and in confidence, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Use your organisational code to access the site.

www.my-eap.com/access

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