

# The 12 Mental Health Tips of Christmas

The Christmas and New Year period is a time for celebration. However, it can also be a time where your mental health can be challenged. Therefore, we've popped together these 12 tips to help you get the most out of the festive season.

## Tip 1: Set boundaries

Don't be afraid to set and be clear about your individual boundaries. This might look like boundaries with certain people, or conversation topics etc. Be firm and assertive, but not aggressive.

Christmas and New Year's Eve often involves catching up with relatives that we don't see regularly or who we not get along with. This sometimes can mean conflict. Although challenging, it can be helpful to have a conversation with someone about topics you don't feeling comfortable discussing. For example *"I really enjoy spending time with you and talking to you, but I don't feel comfortable talking about (topic), as it upsets me, please respect my wishes"* If this doesn't work out, it can be helpful to not engage with this person at all. You don't ever HAVE to give people the time of day, especially if they affect your mental health.

## Tip 2: Avoid excessive alcohol consumption

Whilst a drink or two can be fun while celebrating with friends and family, excessive alcohol consumption can lead to compromised judgement, inhibition and poor behaviour. Know what a standard drink looks like.

Alcohol technically has no 'safe' limit of intake, however, a drink or two may make us feel more relaxed and enjoy ourselves in certain situations. Over consumption of alcohol can result in compromised judgement, impaired memory or inappropriate behaviour. Additionally, the risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic disease is heightened with increased and excessive alcohol consumption. The image below illustrates what is considered a standard drink. Image courtesy of <https://adf.org.au/>



### Tip 3: Set financial limits

Before buying gifts, try to establish a limit on how much you and your family/friends will spend on gifts. This can avoid placing unnecessary financial pressure on people.

Christmas often represents an opportunity for us to spoil the ones we love, and gift giving can be a significant part of Christmas cheer. However, for those already under financial strain, the pressure to purchase expensive gifts for family and friends can cause distress. The important aspect of gift giving is not the financial value of gifts, but the thought involved and the gesture itself. Setting budgetary limits on gifts, like nothing over \$20 can mean that everyone can be involved in gift giving without causing unnecessary distress.

### Tip 4: Stay in touch with friends and family

If you aren't seeing friends and family in person, try to stay in touch through other means. 2020 has been the year of the Zoom call. Plus the many other applications and mediums to keep in touch with family and friends almost anywhere in the world.

If there is one thing that COVID-19 has shown us, it's that Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, Messenger video and Teams are all very good ways to keep in touch and communicate, all from the comfort of a lounge room, bedroom or office. If you have relatives or friends that live far away, setting up a joint video meeting can be a good alternative to ensure you can still see them.

### Tip 5: Ask for help

Don't be afraid to ask others for help. Responsibilities at Christmas can often be shared.

There can often be pressure on one family member to do all of the prep work for gift buying, shopping and preparing meals etc for Christmas Day. This can often occur out of the expectation that because this person has done it in the past, they can and will do it again. This can result in significant distress on that one person, and is typically unfair. If you are this person, don't be afraid to ask for help, you might be surprised to find that others didn't

know that you were struggling. If you're not the person with all the responsibilities, you may want to offer to help them.

### **Tip 6: Stay active**

Try to stay active over the Christmas/New Year period. Something as easy as going on a 20-30 minute walk each day can suffice.

The Christmas and New Year period are times of celebration, however, when not celebrating, try to maintain a 'normal' routine. Going for a short 30 minute walk, or doing a light session at the gym can be a great way to stay active and maintain a routine. However, try to avoid the mindset of exercising to 'burn off' calories or as punishment for eating 'bad' foods. You are entitled to eat the foods you enjoy during this period, guilt free.

### **Tip 7: Get plenty of sleep**

The Christmas/New Year period can often consist of many days of partying, celebrating and late nights. Still try to get 6-8 hours of quality sleep during this time though.

Napping can be a good way to catch up but shouldn't replace a full night's rest. Sleep hygiene refers to habits or behaviours that can improve the quality of sleep. Sleeping in a cool dark environment and minimizing blue light (TV, Phone, Computer) exposure before bedtimes and limiting caffeine intake can improve sleep. Lack of quality sleep is linked to difficulty concentrating, impaired judgement and increased stress. Sleep is particularly important if you are travelling on the road to see family and friends, impaired concentration and judgement can be dangerous.

### **Tip 8: Find time for you**

During the Christmas/New Year period, it's common to be doing lots for others and being responsible for cooking/cleaning etc. Try to find an hour or just for you. This might be going for a walk, reading a book, or catching up on the latest episode of a TV show. Whatever it is, make sure it's something YOU enjoy.

There are no strict rules as to what constitutes 'self-care' or 'me time'. Ideally, the activity should be engaged in purely for the joy of it and not completed out of guilt or responsibility. For example: going to the gym can be self-care for some, but for others who feel obligated to go or guilty if they don't, this can defeat the purpose of 'me time'.

### **Tip 9: Avoid activities that cause distress**

It's okay to set some healthy boundaries and ensure you aren't putting yourself in situations that distress you.

Just because everyone else is signed on to do an activity, if you feel too uncomfortable, it's okay to let them know. Often having a conversation beforehand will result in understanding and even a change of plans to keep you involved.

### **Tip 10: Try to eat well when not celebrating**

It's perfectly acceptable and understandable to eat some delicious foods in the Christmas/New Year period. Sometimes you might overindulge, so try to make sure you are eating some healthy, wholesome meals when not celebrating.

Eating tasty foods and celebrating often go hand in hand. However, much like staying active, it can be helpful to maintain a 'normal' diet outside of times of celebration. If you are struggling with food and eating issues, times of celebration can often exacerbate these issues. If you are struggling, the Butterfly Foundation have some great resources (<https://butterfly.org.au>) and a chat line on 1800 33 4673. However, these should not replace seeing an experienced mental health professional.

### **Tip 11: Practice gratitude**

It's easy to find yourself focusing solely on the negative things in life. Take the time each day to find something to be grateful for. It might be your health, having family and friends present or even just the sunshine.

Practicing gratitude has numerous benefits and can put you in a positive mood. Indeed, research has found that people who consciously count their blessings tend to be happier and less depressed (Wong et al., 2015).

### **Tip 12: Reach out if you're struggling:**

The Christmas/New Year period can be exhausting and overwhelming. If you are struggling to cope, reach out for support and for someone you can talk to.

As always, if you're needing a little bit of extra support at any time of the year, please phone The Anna Centre on (03) 5442 5066 to book an appointment with one of our mental health specialists. However, The Anna Centre is not a crisis or emergency support service, please ring Bendigo Health Psychiatric Triage on 1300 363 788 in times of crisis.

During our Christmas break you can also find support from the following services:

Lifeline (24hr support) – 13 11 14 or webchat  
Kids Helpline (24hr support) – 1800 55 1800 or webchat  
Crisis Care (24 hr support) – 1800 199 008  
Beyond Blue (24hr support) – 1300 22 4636 or webchat

### **Merry Christmas!**

From The Anna Centre

*This article contains general tips only and should not be used in place of advice provided by a mental health practitioner.*