

Depression at Christmas – A Survival Guide



'Tis the Season to be Jolly?

Turn on the television or the radio or look in shop windows and everywhere there are images of happy families having a great Christmas time. Even for those of us who don't celebrate Christmas, it's impossible to ignore. But money or health worries, family tensions, loneliness or isolation don't simply vanish when the holidays are near. In fact, these stresses can be worse at this time of year. And, for the one in five of us who will cope with Depression at some point in our life, the pressure to be festive can make Christmas an especially difficult time.

Some of the following ideas may help you plan for, and cope with, the holiday season.

1. Talk about how you feel.

Sharing your feelings with others and being listened to can make you feel better. You may also find that, despite the way Christmas is portrayed on the high street and in the media, others feel the same as you. If you aren't able to tell to those close to you that you are feeling bad at such a supposedly happy time, you might find it easier to confide in a stranger. There are helplines open over the Christmas period and they are listed at the end of this factsheet.

2. Let go.

Depression often leads to feelings of having to try to do everything and please everyone, but this can create added stress. If you are the person who normally organises Christmas and does all the shopping, cooking and everything else, can you ask for help from somebody else? Can you make your apologies for some social events? If you feel guilty, ask yourself: would you feel as bad if you had a broken leg and were unable to do things? It is easier said than done, but try and let go of some of the burden.

3 Reach out.

You may have read the above paragraph and felt bad because you know you are going to be on your own



Some Signs of Depression

Symptoms may include:

- Feeling unhappy, miserable and lonely a lot of the time
- Feeling negative or hopeless about your life and the future
- Feeling guilty, bad or inadequate
- Feeling agitated, anxious, irritable or moody
- No longer enjoying the things that you used to like doing
- Loss of sex drive
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Difficulty getting to sleep and / or waking early
- Poor concentration and loss of energy or motivation
- Not looking after your personal appearance
- Frequent minor health problems, such as headaches, back pain or stomach-aches
- Not liking yourself, feeling ugly
- Suicidal thoughts
- Self-harming behaviour

If you notice several of these symptoms have been present for more than two weeks and are affecting your life, contact one of the the organisations listed on this factsheet or talk to your GP

at Christmas. It may seem that everyone you know is busy with their own family and friends, but why not ask them if they are free one day to see you? Could you find out if there any local support groups available over the holidays? What about chatting to people on the internet? Some sites are listed at the end of this factsheet.

4. Please yourself.

Whatever your situation, try to plan at least one thing that you enjoy. This could be a small thing like a bubble bath or lighting a scented candle, watching your favourite TV programme with a box of chocolates or a walk in the park. If it's hard to think of something you would enjoy, try something that you used to like which isn't too strenuous. As much as you can, ignore the social and commercial pressure to celebrate in a certain way and concentrate on what the season means to you. You could even choose not to observe the holiday at all, or start your own traditions, whether these incorporate family, social or religious activities or not.

5. Eat, drink, and be moderate.

It can be extremely tempting to pick yourself up by eating a lot of sugary snacks or by drinking a

lot. But this can make you feel much worse later. Alcohol in particular is a powerful mood depressant. There's nothing wrong with indulging in Christmas food and drink that you enjoy, but try not to have too much. Eat plenty of protein and carbohydrates to fill you up and keep your blood sugar steady. Turkey and nut roast are a good source of tryptophan, the amino acid that creates serotonin which can help relieve Depression. Nuts such as Brazil nuts, almonds and walnuts are brain-friendly festive foods. More information is available on our food and mood fact sheet.

...and a happy Hogmanay

The last thing you may feel is optimistic about the upcoming new year. But Depression is not a life sentence. In the majority of cases Depression is treatable with appropriate interventions and support. The stigma about having Depression is slowly declining in Scotland and there are indications that people are beginning to understand the illness better. However you spend the festive season we wish you peace and good health.

For Help and Support

- **Action on Depression:** email info@actionondepression.org, www.actionondepression.org

Helplines Open Over Christmas

- **SANEline** and SANE mail 0845 767 8000, sanemail@sane.org.uk, www.sane.org.uk
- **Samaritans** 08457 909090 (24 hours), jo@samaritans.org.uk, www.samaritans.org.uk
- **Breathing Space** 0800 838587 (Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am & Fri 6pm-Mon 6am) www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Online Support Forums

- **Health Unlocked** Depression discussion and support forum www.healthunlocked.com/actionondepression
- **Mental Health in the UK** User led site with a private group and chat on Facebook www.mentalhealthintheuk.co.uk
- **Living Life to the Full** Free web based life skills course with user forum. www.lltf.com

Further Information

- **SAMH** Scottish Association for Mental Health 0141 568 7000 www.samh.org.uk
- **BACP** British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy 01455 883300 www.bacp.co.uk

