



Managing Expectations at Christmas



It's the most wonderful time of the year! Or, so they say...

While many people swell with festive cheer at the first sight of twinkly lights and tinsel, others will find the Christmas period far more challenging to navigate.

That's because, in amongst all the merriment and indulgence, the holidays can quickly take a toll on our mental, emotional, physical, and financial wellbeing. Whether you're struggling with the disruption to your normal routine or fretting over the financial impact of the festive season, it's important to remember that you're not alone in finding it hard to get in the spirit.

In fact, research by YouGov has found that a quarter of the population finds Christmas more challenging than the rest of the year, with 7% saying it has a negative impact on their mental health. And despite how much the Christmas adverts reinforce the importance of togetherness, just under a quarter of people say they have felt lonely during the dark, cold days of December.

So, how can you manage these difficult emotions when the glow of Christmas feels almost blinding? How can you keep your wellbeing on track when everyone else seems so full of cheer and you just...don't? A good place to start might be to set realistic expectations for the festive season instead of succumbing to the hype.

By recognising that there really is no such thing as a perfect Christmas, we can avoid burnout, alleviate stress, and reduce the need to overspend while making time to be mindful about our own wellbeing. To help you do this, we've put together five tips that may prove useful when it comes to managing your festive expectations.

Stick to A Routine

The Christmas period can often feel chaotic. From changes to your calendar to simply having more things to think about, the stress soon adds up as the season takes its shape. In order to avoid getting overwhelmed, try to stick to a regular routine that allows for proper sleep and plenty of time doing things that make you happy. Whether that's exercise, meditation, time outdoors, or a much-loved hobby, make sure you're practising the activities that bring you peace.

Make A Budget

The cost of living crunch is on everyone's minds right now - perhaps even more so as the already costly season of Christmas approaches. That's why it's vital to create a budget ahead of time and ensure you stick to it. Try to avoid overspending in order to make the experience as magical as possible for others, as it really is the thought and time behind a gift that counts.

If you've got little ones with lengthy Christmas lists, why not encourage them to pick three or four meaningful gifts rather than lots of not-so-meaningful ones? You could also try shifting the focus and excitement to giving rather than receiving by organising a toy collection for underprivileged children, donating blankets to a local animal shelter, or baking cookies for teachers and school bus drivers. Anything that gets them thinking of others and promotes a sense of giving.

Moderate Your Indulgences

We all know that this is the season to eat, drink, and be merry – and there's no reason why you shouldn't treat yourself to a little festive fare. However, with so many goodies so readily available, it can be easy to overindulge. To keep feelings of sluggishness at bay, try to avoid buying (and therefore, consuming) too much food or eating just for the sake of eating. You can set personal intentions for how much you'd like to eat each day and create a strategy for dealing with leftovers.

When it comes to a Christmas tippie, it's important to remember that consuming excessive amounts of alcohol can have long term effects on your health. If you know you're going to be drinking a little more than usual, try to set 'drink-free' days each week during the Christmas and new year period.

Volunteer Your Time

All too often, the spirit of Christmas can become lost to its glittering commercialisation. This in turn can make you feel like you've got a lot to live up to, but in reality there's so much more to the season – and so many more ways to feel fulfilled.

This Christmas, consider volunteering your time to a local organisation or one that has important meaning to you. From gaining new skills to meeting new friends and improving your confidence, volunteering can have a powerful influence on our health and wellbeing – so much so that The Royal Voluntary Service [reports](#) that 80% of their volunteers believe the work they do has improved their mental health, sense of wellbeing, and physical health.

Remembering Those Who Are No Longer Here

One of the most challenging aspects of Christmas is the absence of loved ones who are no longer with us. While the process of grieving is certainly not one-size-fits-all, the festive focus on family and togetherness has a funny way of making that space at the table all the more apparent.

If you're finding the holidays too difficult to face, step away until you're ready to take part. Don't try and force yourself to have fun because you feel that's 'what you should be doing.' Instead, take some space and try to be kind to yourself for not being able to get involved.

When you're ready, you can find special ways to remember (and include) loved ones who are no longer here at Christmas. Whether that's starting a new tradition in their memory, upholding an old one you shared together, crafting a decoration using a treasured photo, or donating to a cause that you know meant a lot to them, there are many ways to make those who have departed feel a little bit closer this Christmas.

Above all else, it's important to create a Christmas that feels right for you. Concentrate on relaxing, being realistic, and be sure to remind yourself: *there's no such thing as perfect.*

Further Support

If your employer offers Vivup's Employee Assistance Programme, there are lots of useful resources that can help make the festive season more manageable. This includes downloadable self-help workbooks *on Alcohol and You, Bereavement, Stress, Anxiety, Depression & Low Mood*, and more. Plus, you can also access a 24-hour telephone helpline for responsive, confidential, and totally independent advice should you or a colleague need mental health support.

Sources

[How does Christmas impact people's mental health? | YouGov](#)

[Alcohol units - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Benefits of Volunteering | Royal Voluntary Service](#)

[How to Manage Your Child's Expectations for Christmas – Kids Money Academy](#)

[Coping with grief at Christmas | Sue Ryder](#)

[Managing expectations \(apa.org\)](http://apa.org)

