

12 Days of Health and Wellbeing this Christmas!

Paycare



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The countdown to Christmas has officially begun in the Paycare office. That's right, the Santa jumpers are on, the Christmas hits are playing and the festive food is out in full force!

Christmas is a time of celebration, where we eat, drink, spend time with loved ones and colleagues and generally enjoy all the festivities that come with it! However, for those who struggle with their **mental health**, the festive season can be difficult.

From preparing to wrap up the year at work with looming deadlines, all the way to personal pressures such as the financial burden of buying presents and the stress of organising family events – the lead up to Christmas is hugely busy and can leave us feeling exhausted, anxious and in much-need of an all-important rest. It's true, mental health doesn't take time off at Christmas, and with all the added stresses that can come with it, it's very important to take time to care for your wellbeing.



Our **12 days of Health and Wellbeing this Christmas blog**, takes a look at the 12 ways we can look after our mental health during this festive season – from planning ahead and getting outside, all the way getting enough sleep and making time for the most important person in your life, YOU!

1. Plan Ahead

So, first things first! Be sure to avoid unnecessary stress over the festive period by keeping everything in your head (we're all guilty!), Simply use a diary or your phone calendar to organise your events and to-do jobs so you feel more prepared! Finally, be careful not to take on too much – so, if you're planning to host a Christmas dinner party, why not ask some of your guests to bring along the desserts or decorations? Every little helps!

2. Make Time For You

During the Christmas countdown, it can be all too easy to get swept up in other peoples' ideas of fun. This can be enjoyable and a great way to socialise, but remember it's important to make sure that you do something for you too. Just saying 'no' when sometimes you aren't feeling up to it, is okay. If your Christmas diary is already getting full of planned festivities, try booking something in advance or setting a free day or two aside just for you.

3. Avoid Comparisons

This is a biggy for Christmas time – and it really can affect your mental health and make you feel like you're not good enough. Well, you are! Remember, if you decide to use social media over the festive season, avoid comparing your experiences and gift-giving to those of your friends. Simply use social media for no other purpose than to catch up with friends and share all your fun times with loved ones, whilst also being able to enjoy seeing what others are doing too!



4. Pace Yourself

The build up to Christmas really is a marathon, not a sprint. The manic Christmas shopping, the festive cooking and the present wrapping can leave us feeling worn out, with little or no chance to just chill.

Remember to give yourself time to relax over the Christmas period – don't be afraid to take time out to go for a walk, listen to music or have a nap if you need it. Again, if you're hosting any Christmas gatherings, try to plan this advance and ask for help from loved ones and friends. The holiday season gives the perfect opportunity to take some time out of your day to day life, and gain some perspective to reflect on the great things that have happened throughout the year.

5. Get Outside

Going for a wintery walk – even if it's just around the block – can be the perfect way to get some fresh air and exercise. In fact, the simple act of walking – whether a swift stride to the shops, a leisurely stroll through the park or a brisk power-walk around the block – can have a huge impact on both our mental and physical wellbeing, making us feel happy and increasing our productivity.



6. Try To Eat Healthy

Let's face it, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a little bit of overindulgence, right?

Whether it's eating chocolate for breakfast or living off Turkey and stuffing all the way through to New Year – we love it! But, a balanced diet is good – not only will eating nutritious food and lots of fruit and vegetables help you stay physically healthy during the festive season, but it will also help to avoid energy lows that can have an effect on your mood.

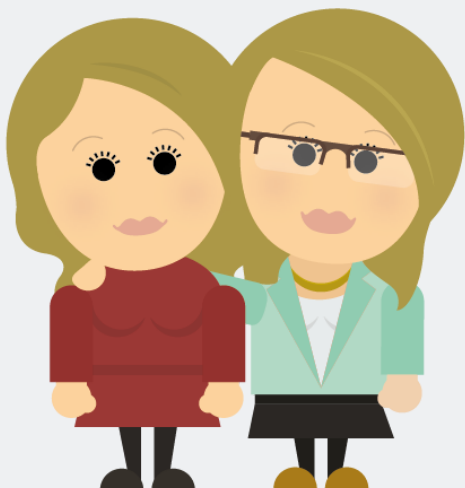
7. Alcohol In Moderation

While a bit of alcohol can make you feel relaxed and help you let your hair down through the manic Christmas countdown, getting carried away and drinking too much alcohol can also leave you feeling irritable and low. Drinking within the recommended guidelines means you'll get to enjoy a Christmas tipples, whilst reducing the negative effects on your mood and health.

8. Get Enough Sleep

Feeling sleepy and not getting our recommended hours can leave us feeling low, irritable, groggy and even more prone to stress. Make sure you take time to look after yourself and plan to get between 7 and 9 hours sleep over the Christmas period.

Don't worry – you'll still be able to enjoy all the planned parties at the same time! We have lots of tips on getting enough shut-eye on our top tips to a restful night's sleep blog.



9. Talk To Someone

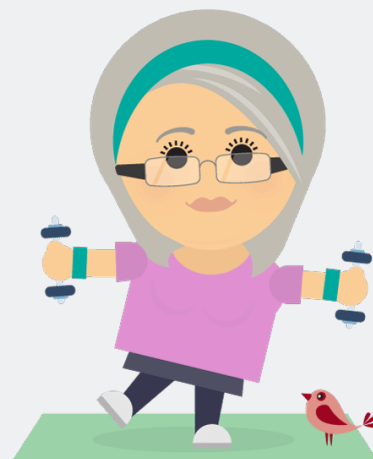
If you're worried about Christmas or feel overwhelmed, don't be afraid to talk to someone. Try having a chat to someone you know and trust, whether it's a loved one, friend or colleague. It's hard to admit that at such an exciting time of year, you may be feeling particularly down and not yourself. But talking about your feelings can improve your mood and make it easier to deal with the tough times.

If you're a Paycare Policyholder, please do make use of our confidential **Counselling Helpline**, which allows you to speak to a qualified counsellor at any time. Whether it's worry, pressure or even loneliness – we're here for you.

10. Keep Active

It's no surprise that the dark mornings, short days and freezing cold weather are not the greatest motivation to get out of bed and head outdoors. But, we all know that exercise can be great for our mental health and, we really can still keep it up over the Christmas period. Whether it's a fresh morning winter walk or having a boogie to some festive classics – an active lifestyle equals a healthy mind!

Exercise, of any sort, from a 3 minute walk or run around the block to an hour-long workout in your local gym, can not only release those 'happy' chemicals that make you feel good, but can also help increase productivity and self-esteem – perfect!



11. Christmas Alone

For those without a big family or hundreds of friends, Christmas and New Year can be a very lonely time. Shockingly, the impact of loneliness and social isolation is said to affect our health and wellbeing more than well-known risk factors such as obesity.

So, if you're spending this Christmas alone, have a think ahead about what you want to do beforehand. It may be that you decide to curl up watching your favourite festive movie, book yourself a short getaway or even arrange to go to out for lunch. You could even consider volunteering, which leads us perfectly onto our final tip...

12. Volunteering

‘Doing good, does you good.’

That’s right... it’s no secret, giving something back really can help you feel good about yourself and what better time to start than during the season of giving! Volunteering not only helps offset the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety, but it makes us happy, increases our self-confidence and gives us the opportunity to meet new friends and socialise with like-minded people. Phew – we think it’s a no brainer!



Well, there you go! Your guide to **12 days of Health and Wellbeing this Christmas...**

We will definitely be sure to share these top tips with the Paycare team throughout the build up to Christmas! Did you find this blog interesting? And have you already started to implement one of the 12 tips to help with your mental health this festive season? If so – let us know!

Tweet us using **@MyPaycare** – we would love to hear your stories!

If you’re worried about your mental health this Christmas, aren’t quite feeling yourself or need to chat to a friendly voice, please make use of our confidential **Counselling Helpline** which comes as standard as part of our Health Cash Plans, where you can get advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



We’re here for you. **#PayCAREforyourself**

References:

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