



## 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 1 in 5 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

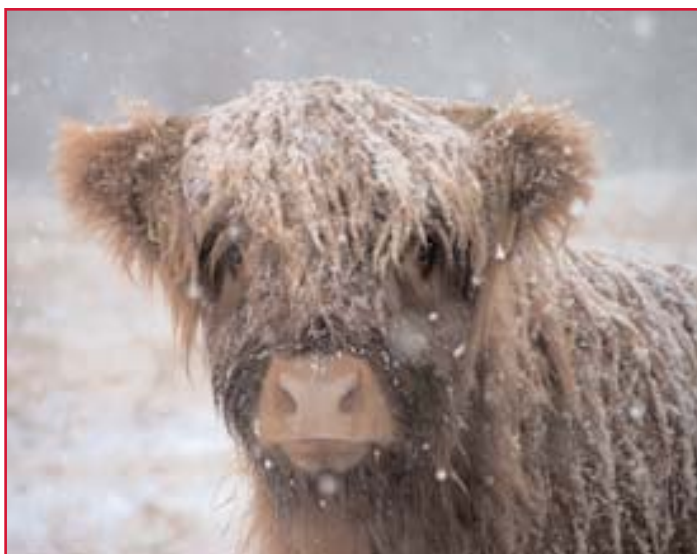
Sharing your feelings with others and being listened to can make you feel better. You may also find that, despite the way Christmas is portrayed on the high street and in the media, others feel the same as you. If you aren't able to tell to those close to you that you are feeling bad at such a supposedly 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 at Christmas. It may seem that



### Some Signs of Depression

Symptoms may include:-

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feeling inadequate
- Anxiety
- Feeling negative about your life
- Not liking yourself, feeling ugly
- Feeling unable to enjoy things that you used to like doing
- Feeling guilty or bad
- Feeling agitated
- Feeling unhappy, miserable and lonely a lot of the time
- Feeling irritable or moody
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Loss of energy or motivation
- Loss of sex drive
- Disturbed sleep
- Poor concentration
- Frequent minor health problems, such as headaches or stomach-aches
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

If symptoms are present for more than two weeks and are affecting your life, contact one of the organisations listed on this factsheet or talk to your GP.

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 in a similar position on the internet?

#### 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 complex carbohydrates to fill you up and keep your blood sugar steady. Turkey and nut roast are a great source of tryptophan, the amino acid that creates serotonin which can relieve Depression. Nuts such as Brazil nuts, almonds and walnuts are brain-friendly festive foods.

Books available on the relationship between food and mood include the Food and Mood Handbook by Amanda Geary (Thorsons). More information can be found at [www.foodandmood.org](http://www.foodandmood.org).

#### ...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 starting to understand the illness better.

However you spend the festive season we wish you peace and good health.

### For Help and Support

- Depression Alliance Scotland 0845 123 23 20, [info@dascot.org](mailto:info@dascot.org), [www.dascot.org](http://www.dascot.org)

### Helplines Open Over Christmas

- SANEline and SANEmail 0845 767 8000, [sanemail@sane.org.uk](mailto:sanemail@sane.org.uk), [www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)
- Samaritans 08457 909090 (24 hours), [jo@samaritans.org.uk](mailto:jo@samaritans.org.uk), [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)
- Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87 (6pm - 2am 365 days a year), [www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

### Support Online

Here are some websites with forums for people with depression. You can find more on our website [www.dascot.org](http://www.dascot.org). Please note it is important that you are careful on the internet as many chats and forums are not moderated and there may be people who will take advantage of vulnerable people. DAS is not responsible for the content of external websites.

- Living Life to the Full Free web based life skills course and a support forum. [www.livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.livinglifetothefull.com)
- Mental Health Forum Forum for people affected by different mental health conditions. [www.mentalhealthforum.net](http://www.mentalhealthforum.net)
- Discuss Depression Forum Talk about depression <http://forum.discussdepression.org/>
- SANE Discussion Board Discussion board run by mental health charity SANE <http://www.sane.org.uk/DB>

