Every life matters
Let’s talk about it

Feeling snowed under?

A guide to surviving Christmas
We all recognise that Christmas and New Year are times of great celebration providing people with an opportunity to come together, exchange gifts, share memories and show friends and family how important they are to us.

However, it is almost impossible to get through Christmas without experiencing some level of stress.

For many it can be a time that brings financial pressure, stress, loneliness and can remind us of sad times in our lives.

There are practical steps which you can take all year round to look after your own and others’ mental health. Here are just a few:

- **Take time for relaxation**
- **Don't over indulge**
- **Fit in some time for exercise such as a gentle walk**
- **If you can, try to be around other people**

This booklet gives some handy hints and tips for surviving the festive season as well as useful information and phone numbers in case you need support.

---

**Tips and hints for before the holiday**

Collect phone numbers of the out of hours and emergency services that will be available (many are at the end of this booklet).

Keep this near your phone, or somewhere you can find it easily.
Tips and hints for Christmas planning

Plan out what you need to do over the festive season
Use the booklet to talk things over with a few friends or family
Make plans with services you are currently receiving such as health and social care workers, support workers or peer supporters

Managing your expectations to have more fun

Top tips to keep Christmas stress to a minimum

✦ Aim for “enjoyable” not “perfect”. Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Don’t try to make it perfect.

✦ Recognise that being together 24/7, may cause tensions, and allow for this.

✦ Minimise “are we nearly there yet?” issues when travelling. It is so disappointing to make travel plans in order to promote family togetherness only to get to the destination feeling stressed. Include pre-planned rest stops, drinks and snacks, music and books on tape, and lots of activities for the kids in the back. Travel off-peak if possible.

✦ Find time for yourself. Don’t spend all your time providing activities for your family and friends. If you’re a parent, remember your own need to have fun, and aim for a balance of activities that meet everyone’s needs.

✦ Planning and teamwork: Involve the family in plans and in the workload. Children can have some say, and parents’ needs count as well.

✦ Don’t try to do it all.
The Mental Health Foundation

Drink sensibly
The celebratory spirit of Christmas and New Year often involves social drinking. Although consumption of alcohol might make you feel more relaxed, it is important to remember that alcohol is a depressant. Drinking excessive amounts can cause low mood, irritability or potentially aggressive behaviour.

By not exceeding the recommended number of safe units, you will be able to sustain good mental health and physical wellbeing.

Eat well
The festive period has become synonymous with over-indulgence, which in turn prompts a pressing desire for many of us to lose weight in the New Year. Therefore, where possible, it is important to maintain a good balance of fruit, vegetables, carbohydrates, protein and omega 3 sources throughout the year in order to help us work towards weight loss in a sensible way.

Maintaining a healthy diet and weight can improve your mood and can work towards preventing symptoms of lethargy and irritability that many of us feel during the busy festive season and dark winter months.

Be active
Exercise releases the feel-good chemicals, endorphins, which help you to relax, feel happy and boost your mood. By undertaking simple tasks such as cycling to work, walking in the park or joining in with Christmas games, you can benefit from experiencing reduced anxiety, decreased depression and improved self-esteem.

In addition, recent research has indicated that regular exercise can help boost our immune systems, enabling us to better fight off colds and flu viruses that are prolific in winter months.

Get involved
The festive period provides us with an ideal opportunity to talk to, visit or engage with the people around us. Face to face communication has been shown to improve our mental and physical wellbeing as this interaction produces the hormone, oxytocin, which can benefit our immune system, heart health and cognitive function.

Our Lonely Society? Report showed that a third of us have a close friend or family member we think is lonely. A Christmas or New Year’s resolution to see our friends and family more often can help to boost both our own mental wellbeing and that of others.
If you are apart from your family then volunteering for a charity or local community organisation can provide that same human contact, as well as help provide essential support and encouragement for others in need. These interactions can easily be sustained throughout the coming year and need not just be for Christmas.

Relax
Christmas can be a very busy and stressful time as we prepare to entertain family and friends, worry about cooking a delicious Christmas dinner and fit in some last minute present shopping. These feelings of being under pressure can produce symptoms of anxiety, anger and difficulty sleeping which, if prolonged, could have a long-term detrimental impact on your mental health and wellbeing.

By exercising more regularly or practicing mindfulness – a combination of meditation, yoga and breathing techniques – you can help to both alleviate the symptoms of your stress and gain more control when coping with difficult situations. Christmas presents aside, implementing a new exercise regime or signing up for a course in mindfulness could be your best investment for a more relaxed Christmas and New Year.

Sleep
Despite many of us having time off work during Christmas and the New Year, our sleep patterns can be disturbed between catching up with friends and family and partying late into the night. There is mounting evidence on the link between sleep and mental wellbeing, meaning improvements in the quality of your sleep could result in improvements to your overall mental health.

There are several steps you can take towards achieving a better night’s sleep: attempting to get back into your regular sleep routine as soon as possible after the party period, consuming less alcohol during the festivities, implementing regular exercise into your weekly routine and taking measures to alleviate your stress.
Opening hours for public services

Health and social work services over the holidays

In Scotland most services will close for the two public holidays at Christmas and New Year.

This year they will be closed on Wednesday 25 and Thursday 26 December 2019. They will reopen on Friday 27 December.

They will close again on Wednesday 1 and Thursday 2 January 2020 and reopen again on Friday 3 January 2020.

Although there will be fewer staff in some of the services due to the holiday period, people who require support during this period will receive it through pre-planning.

For social work emergency services call 0303 123 1008.

Remember to contact NHS24 on 111 if your GP surgery is closed for access to any health services.

Under emergency circumstances A&E and 999 services will work as normal.

To access information on health services over the festive period visit: www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk

Or call the South Lanarkshire Infoline: 0330 3000 133

Tips and hints for during the holiday period

Make sure you have enough medication to last you throughout the holiday period.

For leisure services, check the South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture website: www.sleanoriseandculture.co.uk
Staying safe during the festive season

**Heading out**
- Be prepared – ensure you have enough money for your day/night out and enough to get home if you plan on using public transport or a taxi
- Carry a mobile phone with credit in it if possible
- If you are drinking alcohol be careful, there is nothing wrong with having good time but beware of what is going on around you

**Fire safety**
- Check your smoke and heat alarms are working. Replace batteries if necessary
- If you have an open fire make sure your chimney is swept before winter. Always use a fire guard, secured in position, to protect against flying sparks from hot embers
- Never place Christmas cards or decorations around the mantelpiece
- Check your Christmas light plugs are fitted with the correct fuse, don’t overload extension leads and ensure all electrical devices are Intertek and BEAB approved
- Always switch Christmas lights off and unplug them before you go to bed
- Decorations can burn easily – don’t place them near lights or heaters
- Never leave cooking unattended especially when using hot oil. For early warning of fire consider a heat alarm in your kitchen
- Take time to check on elderly relatives and neighbours this Christmas as they are at greater risk from fire, particularly if they suffer from ill health or disability

For more advice and information from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service check out their Winter and Festive Safety leaflet or go to their website: [www.firescotland.gov.uk](http://www.firescotland.gov.uk)
Useful numbers

Local support
South Lanarkshire Infoline for information on mental health and wellbeing services:
0303 3000 133

Stress Control Classes:
0300 303 0447

Occupational Therapy Community Clinics:
0330 3000 133

Elament Lanarkshire’s online mental health and wellbeing information website:
www.elament.org.uk

NHS Inform:
0800 22 44 88
www.nhsinform.co.uk

Locator Tool:
www.vaslan.org.uk

Other numbers
Samaritans:
116 123

Breathing Space:
0800 838 587
www.breathingspace.scot

AA – Alcoholics Anonymous:
0845 769 7555
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Narcotics Anonymous National Helpline:
0300 999 1212
www.ukna.org

ParentLine:
0800 800 2222

NHS 24: 111

National Domestic Abuse Helpline:
0800 027 1234

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs. Phone: 0303 123 1015 Email: equalities@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

Adapted with kind permission of Health and Social Care North Lanarkshire