



Staying healthy this winter

A guide to having a happy and
healthy winter



firstassist

How to weather winter!

The clocks have gone back, the nights are drawing in and the heating is getting turned up. Yes winter's here and whilst the frosty season brings us holidays, festive fun and cosy fires, it can also mean added pressures as families prepare for the emotional and financial stresses of this time of year.

There are lots of reasons why the festive season means extra stress for many people, often stemming from financial concerns, loneliness, worries about over eating or over drinking, and family or relationship concerns. However, there are plenty of positive ways to tackle these issues and that's why your EAP is there to help.

Remember:

You have access to free 24 hour counselling so there will always be someone to talk to (even on the 25th December!).

You are also entitled to free, confidential legal advice, which is available as usual 24hrs a day throughout the period.



24 hour counselling

Counsellors are on hand who can talk through your problems with you, any time day or night, and help you to regain some balance if your debts or any other issue is leaving you feeling overwhelmed or out of control.

24 hour financial information

It's easy to overspend at this time of year, so make sure you read our article on budgeting opposite, and remember the free financial information provided by professionals through your EAP.

24 hour legal information

You can also call us for free legal advice on any issue, whether it's a dispute with a neighbour, consumer rights or a motoring incident that's concerning you, one call to our legal consultants will provide you with practical and easy to understand advice which will let you know where you stand and the steps you need to take.

Simply call us on:

0800 316021

and quote the unique reference code 71685.

Tips to help avoid the winter cold!

- Japanese researchers found that a daily gargling with water reduces your cold risk
- Run your toothbrush through the microwave on high for ten seconds to kill germs that can cause colds and other illnesses (manual toothbrushes only - no metal!)
- Leave the windows in your house open a crack in winter to chase out germs
- Eat lots of garlic! When 147 volunteers received either one garlic supplement a day or a placebo for twelve weeks between November and February, those taking the garlic were not only less likely to get a cold, but if they did catch one, their symptoms were less intense and they recovered faster.
- Lower the heat in your house 5 degrees. The dry air of an overheated home provides the perfect environment for cold viruses to thrive. And when your mucous membranes (i.e., nose, mouth, and tonsils) dry out, they can't trap those germs very well. Lowering the temperature and using a room humidifier helps maintain a healthier level of humidity in the winter.

Don't cancel the festivities!

Have you thought about how you will afford the festive season this year? If so, you're not alone.

This year :

- 72% were thinking about Christmas and wondering how they were going to afford it this year
- The average family plans to spend almost £300 less on Christmas this year
- On average in 2007 a family spent £840 on presents, food, drink, and decorations but this year, they will pay only £550.

Source: GE Money 2008

If you are worried that you can't afford it this year, it might not be too late to take stock of your financial situation and make sure that you don't overspend.

Budgeting

Making a budget can help you to reduce financial stress by planning and monitoring your spending habits, and it can help you know whether or not you are in control of your finances. Knowing how much you have coming in each week or month, and how much you have to spend can help you cut back on unnecessary spending and even save money, meaning you can use it to work towards goals.

Where to start:

Creating a budget is not difficult, although it may take some concentration and some work to keep up to date, you do not need any special financial or mathematical skills to do it.

Free! money saving tools and information

Download the budget calculator!

www.moneysavingexpert.com is a useful site packed with information and tips to help you save money. You can download a budget calculator which will help you effectively track your income and expenses. Use it to see where your money comes from and where it goes, whether you spend more than you earn and prioritise expenditure to help you reach your savings goals.

Print out a budget form

Another useful site - www.moneybasics.com - offers downloadable budget forms, so you can write down your monthly income and expenses to help you plan ahead.

Money Basics spendometer

You can also track your spending whilst out and about using your mobile phone. Simply download the spendometer from the Money Basics site. If you're trying to stick to a budget, you will need to keep a record of everything you spend, but it's hard work writing everything down in a notebook when you are out and about. By entering each purchase you make onto the Spendometer on your phone, it will keep a record for you. You can even set your own spending limits, and choose how your spending will be reported – daily, weekly or monthly

Remember you have free access to financial information provided by our team of legal consultants through your EAP. They can give you information on a range of financial topics including budgeting and planning, tax, benefits, the Inland Revenue, and debt management.

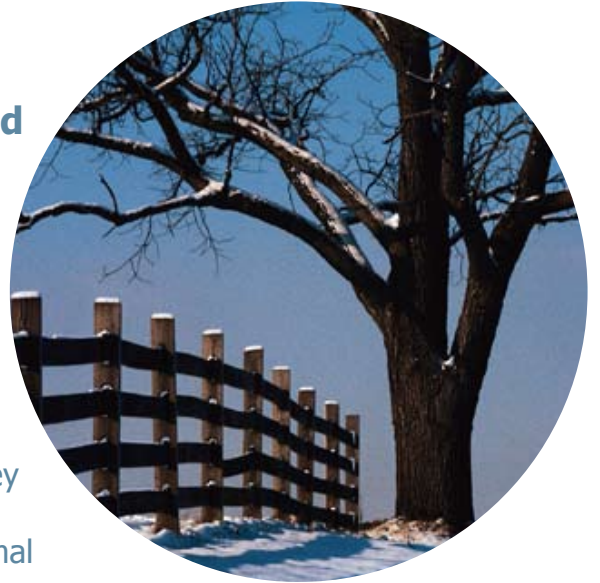


Seasonal Affective Disorder - explained

Do you literally find yourself getting “sick and tired” at this time of year?

Statistics from the Mental Health Foundation suggest Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which is a form of seasonal depression, affects approximately 1 in 100 people in the UK between September and April.

It can be particularly severe during December, January and February, and for some people, SAD is so disabling that they cannot function in winter without continuous treatment. Others may experience a milder version called sub-syndromal SAD or ‘winter blues’.



What causes SAD?

SAD results from a lack of natural light. Biochemical changes in the hypothalamus, which is the part of the brain which controls mood, appetite, sleep, and temperature cause SAD. When light enters the eye, it stimulates nerve impulses to travel to the hypothalamus, but if less light enters the eye or there is a fault in the nerve pathway, hypothalamus activity is affected and so are the functions it controls.

Is it likely to affect you?

SAD can occur at any age, however it seems to be more common in 18-30 year olds and women, however, men can experience more severe symptoms.

Common symptoms:

Depression - feeling low, not wanting to get out of bed, feeling anxious, or an inability to deal with stress

Feeling low in energy - a drop in energy levels and an inability to carry out a normal routine

Disturbed sleep patterns - a desire to oversleep or difficulties in staying awake

A change in appetite - Most commonly a craving for sweet foods and carbohydrates

Social anxiety - Avoiding friends and family and social situations

Weakened immune system - Vulnerability to catching winter colds and flu.

Mood changes - For some people bursts of over-activity and cheerfulness (known as hypo-mania) in spring and autumn.

Apathy – Loss of motivation and ability to concentrate

How to combat SAD

Once diagnosed, there are treatments which can help combat SAD. ‘Light boxes’ or ‘light therapy’ have been proven effective in up to 85% of cases. This involves spending up to four hours per day exposed to light that is at least ten times the intensity of domestic lighting. This works by mimicking outdoor light, which causes a biochemical change in the brain that lifts low mood.

SAD : how to help yourself

Ensure you get enough natural light

Make the most of the natural light that's available by getting outdoors as often as you can.

Exercise to relieve stress and eat well

Exercise and good nutrition are known to have a positive impact on mental health and well-being, try to make sure you exercise regularly and eat a balanced diet that includes lots of fresh fruit and veg and keep alcohol intake to a sensible level.

Socialise

Make an effort to socialise and take time out to do things you enjoy. If possible, try and take a holiday abroad to sunnier climes during the winter.

Talk to others

Let others know how you are feeling, it could really help. Your employer has provided you with free support services, including telephone counselling 24 hours day. To access it, see the first page of this booklet.

Avoid alcohol

Alcohol is a depressant and will only make symptoms worse.

Start your treatment early

Starting these measures or treatment early should minimise the onset of SAD, and could prevent the symptoms. Carry these measures on until after the time your symptoms usually begin to diminish.

Plan ahead

Avoid the extra stresses of the holiday season, by planning ahead and ensuring you don't leave everything until the last minute. Plan ahead - by stocking up the freezer, buying Christmas presents early and avoiding the rush.

Remember: if your symptoms continue for two weeks or more and are having an effect on your ability to function normally see your GP.



Staying healthy through the festivities

Keep well this winter with our top tips!

Healthy eating

Ensure you maintain an element of healthy eating by ensuring your diet contains:

- Plenty of starchy foods like bread, rice, pasta, breakfast cereals, potatoes, yams and sweet potatoes - look for higher fibre versions where possible (like wholemeal bread or pasta)
- At least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables daily
- Moderate amounts of dairy products (or alternatives) - look for low fat versions where possible
- Moderate amount of meat, fish or alternatives like eggs, beans, peas and lentils - look for lower fat versions where possible
- The occasional treat (foods that are higher in fat, salt or added sugar should only be eaten in moderation)



Drink sensibly

Drinking moderate amounts of alcohol doesn't often cause any problems, however, drinking too much can be harmful.

The Department of Health advises that men should not drink more than three to four units of alcohol per day, and women should drink no more than two to three units of alcohol per day.



Alcohol - a guide

- One unit of alcohol is equivalent to 10ml of pure alcohol.
- 1 pint of strong lager = 3 units
- 1 pint of ordinary lager, bitter or cider, 175ml glass of wine = 2 units
- 1 alcopop = 1.5 units
- 1 measure of spirits = 1 unit
- Many wines are around 11 or 12 per cent alcohol, so a small glass = 1.5 units
- Lagers and ciders sold in bottles are usually stronger than those sold on draught. You can find out exactly how many units of alcohol are in the bottle by reading the label.

Get vaccinated

Flu is an illness caused by the influenza virus - it is an infectious disease of the upper air passages and can spread easily from person to person. Outbreaks of seasonal flu follow predictable seasonal patterns and occur annually, usually in winter. Unlike pandemic flu, you can be vaccinated to protect yourself from suffering from seasonal flu.



Recognising flu symptoms:

If you've got flu you're likely to develop the following symptoms:

- a sudden fever, with a high temperature (generally above 38°/100°F)
- a chill
- a severe headache
- muscle aches and pains
- a sense of feeling weak and tired
- a dry cough
- a sore throat

Keep active

Find ways of increasing your activity which are realistic for you. This doesn't have to mean going to the gym or taking up sport – many people find it suits them better to go for a regular walk or join a dance class.

As an adult you should aim to be active on five or more days of the week:

- 30 minutes of activity will have general health benefits and improve your fitness
- increase activity to at least 60 minutes to help you lose weight and stop weight going back on



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call free 0800 316 0201
and quote the unique reference code 71685

lines open 24 hours every day.

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