

Look after your mental health over the holidays

Look after your mental health and that of your loved ones over the holiday period. Christmas is traditionally viewed as a time of celebration and happiness, but unfortunately for some it can also be stressful and lonely.

Tips on dealing with stress

Many of us will be looking forward to the Christmas holidays so that we can spend time with our family and friends.

However, this time of the year also brings stress, with people worrying about money, remembering the loss of a loved one, or feeling lonely.

Practical tips on dealing with stress over the festive season include:

- make time for family and friends
- go for a walk or run, cycle, play a game, garden or dance – exercising makes you feel good
- stop, pause, or take a moment to look around you
- don't be afraid to try something new, rediscover an old hobby or set yourself a new challenge over the holidays
- don't be afraid to give and accept support – being available for others if they need support should encourage them to be there for you too

People often use [alcohol](#) to relax, but instead of helping us to cope it can make things worse. If you choose to drink, know your limits and avoid excessive or binge drinking.

You can find out more about mental health and available services at this [link](#):

Look out for the welfare of others

As well as our own, we should also look out for family members, friends and neighbours and be mindful of their mental health.

It's important to look out for behaviour that could show that someone is under pressure and really needs help.

If you're worried or concerned about someone else, talk to them. Ask them how they are feeling and if there is anything you can do to help them.

Distress or despair

If you think someone might be in need of immediate help, find out what to do at this [link](#):

If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, call [Lifeline](#) on:

The helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

More useful links

[Enjoying Christmas with a loved one who has dementia](#)

Date published: 18 December 2017

Christmas can pose challenges for people living with dementia, and those close to them. Here are some tips to help everyone enjoy the festive season.

Involve your loved one

In the lead up to the Christmas period, involve your loved one who has [dementia](#).

Things you could do include:

- discuss with them what they would like to do over the Christmas period – do they want to visit friends or would they like friends to visit them in their own home
- if family and friends cannot come home for Christmas, consider setting up face time or video calls, this is a fabulous way of people keeping in touch
- if you haven't done so already, involve them in putting up the Christmas tree and decorations – it provides a perfect opportunity for them to reminisce about their early memories of Christmas and the enjoyable times with friends and family in years gone by
- if they enjoyed shopping but are less mobile, encourage [online shopping](#), and give them independence over choosing presents for their loved ones
- arrange for them to go to their local church and/ or carol service over the festive period
- if they like to be involved in the preparation of food, continue this tradition so that it makes them feel that they have an active role to play and they don't feel excluded

Advice for carers

If you are a carer:

- [share the caring duties](#), if family members are home over the Christmas period ask them to help out with the caring role
- devise a rota for caring duties and have some back-up plans in case agreed arrangements don't fall into place (grandchildren, friends and neighbours may also wish to be part of a 'one-off' rota for caring or befriending, this can allow you to have a night out or a day's shopping in the run-up to Christmas)
- you need to spend precious time with your own family, such as husband, wife, partner, children and grandchildren – you should not feel guilty about someone else doing your caring duties
- don't forget your own health and wellbeing – plan in advance what you wish to do if you get a break at Christmas from your caring duties

Dementia

You can find information about the signs of dementia, how to get a diagnosis, and where to find help and support in the [dementia section](#).

More useful links

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[Risks of buying illegally-imported dogs](#)

If you're thinking of buying a pet dog, beware unknowingly paying for one which has come from outside the UK and has not been properly vaccinated. Disease and having the dog quarantined are some of the risks.

Illegal trade

There is an ongoing illegal trade in pups imported from eastern Europe. There has been an increase in cases of genuine buyers being duped into buying illegally-imported pups.

These pups are often bred in very poor conditions, which give rise to major health and welfare concerns.

Risk of disease and quarantine

All dogs entering Northern Ireland from outside the UK, must be:

- at least 15 weeks old
- [microchipped](#)
- correctly vaccinated against rabies
- treated for tapeworm (unless the dog comes directly from Finland, Republic of Ireland, Malta or Norway)
- in possession of a pet passport or veterinary certificate

Where the legal requirements are not met, pets will either:

- go into quarantine for a period of up to four months at the owners' expense
- be sent back to the country they have travelled from or
- face the possibility of being destroyed

This is necessary to keep Northern Ireland free of diseases such as rabies and Alveolar Echinococcus (a very severe human disease caused by tapeworms).

Not all families will be able to afford these additional costs and therefore face the risk of having to experience the heartache of not being reunited with their family pet.

Advice

Useful advice about buying puppies (and specifically imported dogs) is provided on the following page:

It also has detailed guidance on the requirements for pet animals being brought into Northern Ireland from countries outside the UK.

Alternatively anyone considering bringing a pet into the country can contact Trade Section, DAERA for advice by:

It is also worth remembering there are many puppies and dogs cared for by local animal charities needing new homes with caring owners.

More useful links

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[Think about fire safety over the](#)

Christmas period

Be aware of fire safety over the Christmas period and check in on older or vulnerable people. You should also make sure that everyone in your house knows what to do in the event of a fire and how to escape safely.

Extra fire risks at Christmas

Christmas is a time when extra fire hazards are in the home, including:

- candles
- portable heaters
- open fires that haven't been lit for a long time
- fairy lights
- overloaded sockets

Fires can start easily. To reduce the risk of fire over the festive period, you should:

- check that your Christmas lights conform to the British Standard
- never use lights with worn or frayed cables
- turn off lights at night or when you are leaving the house
- never place candles near your Christmas tree, decorations or furnishings
- put candles in a purpose-made holder and on a heat-resistant surface
- never put candles under shelves
- never leave burning candles unattended
- never attach decorations to lights or heaters
- never overload electrical sockets
- never leave a cooker unattended – most fires start in the kitchen
- make sure cigarettes are completely stubbed out before going to bed
- keep candles, lighters and matches out of the reach of children
- keep heaters away from soft furnishings and decorations

You can find out more about fire safety at the following links:

Also, people relax and can sometimes become complacent about their fire safety. You should:

- test your smoke alarm(s) every week and make sure to replace the battery or the smoke alarm if it is not working
- make sure anyone staying in your house knows what to do in an emergency – make a fire escape plan
- take the time to check on elderly or vulnerable relatives and neighbours this Christmas – make sure they are fire safe

You should try and celebrate Christmas and New Year safely – the risk of accidents is greater after [drinking alcohol](#).

Older or vulnerable people

Check in with older family, friends, neighbours and those who are isolated in the community and make sure they have a working smoke alarm.

Check their home for Christmas fire hazards and advise them of steps they can take to help 'STOP' fire in their home.

If you're worried about the fire safety of someone in your community you can register them for a [free Home Fire Safety Check](#).

Firefighters will install or check that smoke alarms are working, help to identify any obvious dangers, and advise on an escape plan.

More useful links

[Make sure your farm is ready for severe weather](#)

Date published: 11 December 2017

If you own a farm, think about the main risks winter brings and work out how you would deal with severe weather. How would it affect your ability to provide water, food and shelter for your animals?

Winter problems

Potential problems over winter include:

- frozen and [burst pipes](#)
- [snow](#)
- interruption of water supply
- [flooding](#)
- difficulty in moving materials or stock around the farm
- problems with deliveries to or collections from the farm

Weather forecast

Keep a close eye on the weather forecast so that you are able to take appropriate action, for example:

- consider whether you need to move animals to lower ground or fodder

stocks to a more sheltered location

- if farm lanes become unsafe in the event of snow and ice, consider the need for marker signs at the edges and/ or alternative routes
- keep main access areas ice-free/ salted to avoid potential accidents that may involve humans, animals, or machinery
- if milk collections are suspended make sure you have extra storage capacity in place
- if feed deliveries can't get through, make sure you have enough feed stored to cover three days

Water supply

Clean water essential on all farms but its supply may be interrupted by frozen or burst pipes. You should aim to have at least 24 hours of water stored.

The following checklist should help:

- make sure you know the layout of pipes within your land – it should be recorded on a map
- know where your stop valves are and make their location more obvious by marking them with one of Northern Ireland Water's free stop valve tags
- consider isolating your water supply to areas of the farm not used during winter – you may need to install new stop valves to make this possible
- keep a supply of relevant fittings to repair any leakages
- know where your meters are located and check them regularly – an unexpectedly high reading could indicate a leak and should be investigated
- inspect troughs not in use at this time of year and consider turning off the water supply and draining the trough
- underground pipes should be buried at least 750 mm below ground level
- make sure any pipes within buildings are insulated and protected from livestock
- make sure that all tanks, pipes and pumps are in good working order and not leaking – and fix dripping taps
- have the name and contact details of at least one registered plumber easily available in case of an emergency
- keep farm watercourses clean to help ensure that water flows easily away following a thaw to minimise the risk of flooding
- to report a water supply problem, contact [Northern Ireland Water](#)

Prepare your farm for the unexpected – it could save you a lot of problems in the future.

More useful links

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