



December Wellness Tip:

Dealing with December

December can be a tough month. It's a time where Christmas is all around – it is inserted into the songs heard on the radio and in any shopping mall, as well as in movies and TV shows; it is the constant advertisements, Christmas get togethers, and decorations all over.

For some, they love Christmas because it is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus. For those who do not believe in Christ, they may still love Christmas as a time of giving and gatherings. For others it may be an annoyance, or even a painful time.

Christmas time is often paired with the idea of happy families, lots of friends, and joyful times. It's hard, if not impossible, for reality to live up to these expectations. It's especially hard to live up to what is often reflected in the feel-good movies and stories.

The truth is, **no family is perfect nor any family gathering**. It can be pleasant but for some it can be a grit-one's-teeth-and-try-to-get-through-it time. For others, they are estranged from family, or living too far away to get together at Christmas or have been lost due to death or other reasons. Friends may be busy with their own families and don't think to reach out to those who may be alone.

Christmas can be a magical and exciting time, but it can also be a time of stress, anxiety, and loneliness.

For those who do have gift exchanges, there can be pressure to get the perfect gift, and stress if finances are tight. For students trying to study for final exams, there is that pressure as well as time crunches of trying to fit in the uptick of activities related to Christmas. To top it off, the days are getting darker and darker as the hours of sunlight shorten. This can be problematic, especially for those with SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder).

So how do you deal with December?

My first suggestion is: **be gentle with yourself**. Take time out to relax, do something you enjoy, and take care of yourself. If you have too many activities in December, it's okay to say no when you don't really want to go or just need some time out.

Lower expectations and instead of creating an image of how everything must go, **be open to what it may be**. Perhaps traditions can be changed, or new ones emerge.

Simplify. If life feels too crazy and rushed, maybe those cookies don't have to be handmade, or Christmas cards sent out to everyone you know.

If you buy gifts and are stressing about what to get and/or afford it, how about **gifting an experience**? Spending time doing something fun is usually more memorable than a material thing was bought. Buy

something that is small, yet shows that you have thought about the person (e.g. special tea for a tea drinker, a donation to a person's favourite charity, putting together a little booklet of recipes you found on line for the one who likes to cook, etc.). This can mean more than an expensive yet impersonal gift.

If lack of sunlight affects your mood, purchase a full spectrum light – or go sit by the one in the CALM room in Corbett Hall, or in the downtown Edmonton Public Library. Take a walk outside as much as possible when it is light.

Put down your cellphone and **connect with people**. Have more face-to-face conversations (or over the phone) rather than texting or emailing. This will help alleviate feelings of loneliness.

Volunteer. When we give, we get back so by helping others we feel better ourselves. It doesn't have to be something long term or even official. For example, for a few years I called a nursing home in my neighbourhood to arrange a day and time, then sent the word out to my neighbours asking them to join in singing Christmas carolling. It was a great way to make a difference for the elderly residents, put us in the Christmas mood, and have some social time with neighbours.

Elderly are often alone with absolutely no one to visit them. Contact a senior's care facility and spend some time just talking with them, reading to them, playing a game, or engaging in a hobby together.

Look for the good, the hope, the possible and be thankful.

Spend time every day on **gratitude**. I covered this in a previous wellness tip but worth a reminder that whatever we focus on grows.

If you are having a gathering on Christmas Eve and/or Christmas Day, **please extend an invitation to someone who may be alone**. Growing up we had lots of extended family over in a very small house and yet always looked out for someone we could invite that may have otherwise been alone. It made us feel good to do that, and hopefully made someone else's Christmas a good one.

Organize a gathering yourself. I can guarantee that there are many, many people that don't have a place to go on Christmas Day and would love to be invited. Some call it an 'Orphan Christmas' but you can call it anything you want! You can make it a potluck, and/or host with someone else to take some of the pressure off. What's important is connecting – not whether the potatoes are a little lumpy.

Above all, remember that each and **every one of you is a light in the world**. Just like a Christmas tree lights up a room, you light up the world.

You are a gift to the world and the kindness and caring you bring to it.

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