

The Holidays & Potential Risks

For people living with mental illness and their friends, relatives and colleagues, the holiday season can be a time of risk and overindulgence with significant consequences.

- 76.6% of people who have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression experience a relapse or exacerbation of their symptoms during the winter holiday (*Canadian Mental Health Association*)
- 19% of respondents felt less able to manage their mental health because of worries about paying off the cost of Christmas (*Reported in Medical News Today 11th Jan. 2008*)
- Overindulgence in alcohol can reduce the effectiveness of many medications used for treating mental illness
- Overscheduling holiday parties and social events can cause one to feel overloaded and reduce coping capacity.
- Change in routine during the holidays can increase the likelihood individuals will miss taking their medication or take medication irregularly
- The lack of sunlight during the holiday season, among the shortest days of the year, can elevate depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)
- Overindulgence in food can make people tired and lethargic leading to increased feelings of being overwhelmed and regretful
- 5.3% of drivers involved in injury collisions and 22.5% of drivers involved in fatal collisions had consumed alcohol before the crash

The expectations of the holiday season can at times be unrealistic. Be aware of the effects this may have on yourself and your loved ones. This awareness is even more important for those dealing with mental illness, their friends and family.

Tips for staying mentally healthy over the holidays

- Set priorities: don't become overwhelmed with too many activities.
- Ask for help before you are feeling overwhelmed.
- Be cautious about overindulgence: alcohol, spending, food, etc.
- Stay within a budget
- Include others in your plans.
- Don't forget to take your medications and keep to as much of a regular routine as possible.
- Don't ignore warning signs: change in sleep, increased irritability, depressed mood or lack of personal time

If you or a family member is having difficulty coping during the holiday season, assistance is available by contacting the appropriate support service listed below.

Contact Information:

Staff members & eligible dependents:

Employee and Family Assistance Program
Homewood Human Solutions
Phone: 780.428.7587 (24/7)
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/efap

Health Promotion and WorkLife Services
Phone: 780.492.7124
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/worklife

Students:

University Wellness Services
Psychiatry & Student Counselling Services
Phone: 780.492.2612
www.uwell.ualberta.ca

Postdoctoral Fellows:

Postdoctoral Fellows Assistance Program (PDAP)
Homewood Human Solutions
Phone: 780.428.7587 (24/7)
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/pdap

Graduate Students

Graduate Student Assistance Program (GSAP)
Homewood Human Solutions
Phone: 780.428.7587 (24/7)
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/gsap

Everyone:

The Support Network
Phone: 780.482.HELP (24/7)

