

Health Care Column

Tips to Stay Healthy Over the Holidays

By Dr. Jason Sutherland, North East LHIN Primary Care Lead

December 19, 2018 – This time of the year can be challenging for many – from shopping and travelling to dinners and gatherings – the holidays can disrupt routines and cause stress. It's important that you take the time to care for yourself.

Overindulgence and Christmas often go hand-in-hand; with so many celebrations, there are more opportunities to eat and drink too much. It's suggested that the average Canadian consumes about 6,000 calories on Christmas day alone – three times more than the daily average. The feasting can lead to heartburn, fatigue, as well as weight gain. When it comes to holiday foods, try to eat consistently throughout the day and avoid skipping meals which can lead to overeating. It's also important to keep portions in check when enjoying your festive favourites. Eating a little lighter or healthier or skipping a course can help improve energy and your mood. Proper eating habits are also key to managing stress.

The holidays can involve some social drinking as well. Consuming alcohol can make people feel more relaxed, but it's important to remember alcohol is a depressant, and drinking excessive amounts can cause low mood or aggressive behaviour. If you choose to drink alcohol, drink slowly, dilute spirits with ice or mineral water, and alternate drinks with non-alcoholic options.

While the holidays can be a happy time, they can also put a lot of pressure on mental health. If you are dealing with a mental illness, the added stresses of the holidays (family, travelling, financial pressures) can be overwhelming. You can help reduce your stress by acknowledging your feelings and understanding that you can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek support – talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Exercise can also help to alleviate the symptoms of stress and reduce anxiety, as well as counter the food and drinks. Physical activity releases endorphins which help you to relax and boost your mood. So, don't sit down all day; take a winter walk, go skating, or join in some holiday games. In addition, regular exercise can help boost your immune system, enabling you to better fight off colds and the flu.

For people who are dealing with feelings of sadness or anxiety, there are several helplines and online services you can use during times when your primary care provider's office might be closed:



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- **The North East LHIN's Regional Warmline:** Offers pre-crisis help, so that Northerners in need of mental health, addictions or other support after hours can speak to a peer and find out about services. Operated by the Northern Initiative for Social Action (NISA), the telephone line also empowers people with lived mental health experience by providing employment opportunities. **Open 6 p.m. to 12 a.m., seven nights per week, by dialing 1-866-856-9276.**
- **Drug and Alcohol Helpline: 1-800-565-8603**
- **Mental Health Helpline: 1-866-531-2600**
- **BounceBack** is a free, skill-building approach to help people (15 years+) with depression and anxiety. Available in multiple languages, it offers three to six telephone coaching sessions, workbooks and videos. Online videos also offer practical tips on managing mood, sleeping better, building confidence, increasing activity, problem solving, and healthy living. To find out more go to <https://bouncebackontario.ca>
- **Big White Wall**, currently available only in English, is an online peer support and self-management tool for adults and youth aged 16 and older experiencing symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety. People sign up anonymously and no referral is necessary. To find out more about Big White Wall go to <https://www.bigwhitewall.ca>
- www.northeasthealthline.ca is a resource for patients, caregivers, health care providers, and anyone wanting to learn about the more than 1,200 health services available for non-emergency medical needs in communities across Northeastern Ontario.
- To learn more about the programs and resources available to help you eat healthy, visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/healthy-choices>

Wishing you happy holidays and good health in the New Year!

For more information, contact:

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