



# HOLIDAY HANDBOOK

Your guide to the  
Holiday Season



acacia EAP  
employee assistance program

every  
connection  
matters™

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*“THE JOY OF  
BRIGHTENING  
OTHER'S LIVES  
BECOMES FOR US  
THE MAGIC OF THE  
HOLIDAYS.”*

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W.C. JONES

# PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS



## TIPS AND TRICKS TO GET YOU THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Despite the usual depictions of the holiday season, this time of year can be a very stressful period for many. This end of the year might mean complex social interactions with family or relatives that you might not want to see. There may be expectations, or at least perceived expectations, for the 'perfect celebration' complete with the perfect gift and perhaps the most important meal of the year.

### Plan Ahead

List what you need and get it sorted early. This might include shopping, food, decorations, or even travel arrangements. Make it as detailed as possible, so you can prioritise. What can be done now? What's essential?

Give yourself plenty of time. Tasks often take a lot longer than we think they will! Do not overestimate how much you can achieve the day or night before. Delegate certain tasks to other family members to reduce your workload.

Keep your list for next year; it'll need updating, but it will give you a good starting point.

Know when to stop! Decide when to stop preparations and when to start relaxing and enjoying the holidays. Try to stick to this goal, even if it is in the late afternoon or the night before. Remember the holidays are for you to enjoy too.

### Shopping

Set a budget and stick to it. Consider starting a holiday season savings account early and contribute small amounts regularly. Avoid using credit cards or Buy Now, Pay Later systems, as they make it easy to forget how much you've bought and can cause you to spend more than you think. Shop online – it can save time and money.

Ask your friends and family if gifts are necessary. You may be surprised to learn others are relieved at not having to buy gifts too.

# TIPS FOR THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

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## On the Day

### Set Realistic Expectations

Remember, perfection isn't the goal—enjoying the moment with loved ones is. Focus on creating memories rather than stressing over every detail. Practice mindful attention and being present with your loved ones.

### Take Breaks

It's okay to step away for a few minutes to recharge. Whether it's a quiet walk outside or a few deep breaths, giving yourself space helps manage overwhelming moments.

### Delegate Tasks

Share responsibilities with others, whether it's cooking, cleaning, or organising. This can lighten your load and help everyone feel involved.

### Stay Organised

Create a simple plan for the day, including a schedule for meals and activities, so you can manage time effectively and avoid last-minute chaos.

## Managing Visits and Socialising

### Set Boundaries

If you're visiting multiple family members or hosting guests, be clear about your time commitments. It's okay to leave early or take a break to recharge if needed.

### Balance Socialising with Alone Time

Spending time with family and/or friends is important, but so is taking care of yourself. Find moments to relax away from the crowd, whether it's for a short walk or a few minutes of quiet.

### Be Flexible with Expectations

Not every visit will go as planned, and that's okay. Be open to spontaneity and let go of rigid expectations to enjoy the day as it unfolds.

### Practice Gratitude

Focus on the positive moments of the day, whether it's a kind gesture, a shared laugh, or a peaceful moment with a loved one. Gratitude helps shift your perspective and ease stress.



# PRACTICING GRATITUDE

Gratitude is more than just saying "thank you", it's a mindset that involves actively recognising and appreciating the positive aspects of life. Research has shown that practicing gratitude can lead to significant improvements in mental health and overall wellbeing. Gratitude helps build emotional resilience by shifting our focus from what's going wrong to what's going right. When we intentionally reflect on the good things in our lives, we begin to develop a greater sense of contentment and acceptance. Studies have shown that people who regularly practice gratitude experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety. In fact, a study published in *Psychological Science* found that individuals who kept a daily gratitude journal reported increased levels of happiness and decreased feelings of loneliness.



Gratitude has also been shown to improve sleep quality. A study in *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* found that participants who wrote down things they were thankful for before bed fell asleep faster and reported better overall sleep quality. Sleep is crucial for mental wellbeing, and practicing gratitude can provide a simple way to calm the mind before sleep, reducing rumination and fostering relaxation.

Expressing gratitude can strengthen relationships, which is especially important during the holiday season. A study published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* found that expressing gratitude to friends and family helps build stronger, more supportive social bonds. Feeling connected to others has a direct impact on mental wellbeing, providing a buffer against feelings of isolation or loneliness, which can sometimes be heightened during the holidays.

Gratitude can also help reduce the physiological effects of stress. A 2015 study published in ***Journal of Clinical Psychology*** found that individuals who practiced gratitude experienced lower levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. When we focus on gratitude, we are less likely to become overwhelmed by negative emotions or stressors. This is particularly helpful during the holidays, when the demands of gift-buying, hosting, and social obligations can be overwhelming.

# PRACTICING GRATITUDE

**The holiday season, while joyous, can also be a time of heightened stress and emotional strain. From family dynamics to financial pressures, the holidays can sometimes feel overwhelming. Practicing gratitude during this time can be particularly helpful for several reasons:**

## 01 COUNTERACTING HOLIDAY STRESS

Gratitude provides a powerful antidote to the stress that often accompanies the holiday season. By focusing on what we are grateful for, whether it's the support of loved ones, the warmth of traditions, or simply the beauty of the season—we can shift our attention away from the challenges and stresses that may arise. This shift in focus can reduce anxiety and help us approach the holidays with a more positive and grounded mindset.

## 03 BUILDING RESILIENCE DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

For some, the holidays may also bring up feelings of sadness, loss, or loneliness. In these moments, practicing gratitude can provide a sense of perspective and help individuals find things to be thankful for, even in tough situations. This can be especially healing when combined with social support, such as talking to a friend or counsellor. Acknowledging small moments of beauty or kindness, like a friendly gesture, a warm meal, or a peaceful moment, can help people navigate difficult emotions.

## 02 CREATING A POSITIVE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Family gatherings during the holidays can sometimes bring up difficult emotions or tensions. Practicing gratitude can help shift the focus of interactions from disagreements or unmet expectations to appreciation for each other's presence and contributions. Acknowledging what you appreciate about family members or friends can foster a more positive and harmonious environment.

## 04 ENHANCING JOY AND CONNECTION

Gratitude helps us appreciate the present moment and the people around us. During the holidays, it encourages us to celebrate the simple joys of life—whether it's the laughter of children, the taste of a favourite holiday dish, or the joy of giving and receiving gifts. By consciously practicing gratitude, we enhance our sense of connection to others and the world around us, leading to deeper feelings of joy and fulfillment.

# PRACTICING GRATITUDE

**If you want to incorporate gratitude into your daily routine, here are a few simple ways to get started:**

## **Keep a Gratitude Journal**

Write down three things you're grateful for each day. They can be big or small, anything from a kind word from a friend to the beauty of a sunny day. The more specific you are, the more powerful the practice will be.

## **Express Your Gratitude**

Take a moment to express your appreciation to others. A simple "thank you" can go a long way in strengthening your relationships and building a sense of connection.

## **Mindful Reflection**

Set aside a few minutes each day for mindful reflection. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and reflect on the things you're thankful for in your life. This practice can help shift your focus away from stress and bring a sense of calm and peace.

## **Gratitude in Action**

Show your gratitude by doing something kind for others, whether it's volunteering, offering a thoughtful gift, or simply helping someone in need. Acts of kindness not only help others but also reinforce your own sense of gratitude and wellbeing.



# MANAGING MONEY

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## SET LIMITS

One of the first steps to managing your money during the holiday season is setting clear limits. Before you begin shopping or making plans, establish a budget for each category—gifts, food, travel, entertainment, and decorations.

Break down the amounts you can afford to spend on each person or event and stick to those limits. Maintain a running total of costs to help keep an eye on spending. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the season, but by setting boundaries ahead of time, you'll be able to avoid impulse purchases and stay on track.

When buying gifts, prioritise meaningful, thoughtful options, and set a specific budget for each person to avoid overspending. Think about what would be most meaningful for people in your life, for some people this might be help in the garden, an experience, or simply spending time together.



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## SAVE MONEY

Saving in advance can significantly ease the financial strain of the holiday season. If possible, start putting aside money early in the year by setting up a holiday savings account or simply contributing small amounts to your savings fund each month. Saving up rewards points of the year can also be a helpful way to extend your budget. This way, when the holidays roll around, you'll have a financial cushion to rely on.

Additionally, take advantage of sales, discounts, and special offers to get the most value for your money. Look for deals during Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and other holiday sales to stretch your budget further.

If you're on a tight budget, consider giving homemade gifts or experiences, which are often more affordable and can be just as meaningful as expensive store-bought items.



# MANAGING MONEY

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## BOOK AHEAD

Planning ahead is key to managing both your time and your money during the holiday season.

Whether it's booking travel, securing holiday accommodation, or scheduling events, advance planning helps you avoid last-minute costs and allows you to find better deals. If you're traveling, book flights or accommodations early to get the best rates and avoid the premium prices that come with last-minute bookings.

Similarly, if you're attending or hosting events, plan ahead for meals, decorations, and other expenses so that you're not scrambling to make purchases at the last minute. The earlier you plan, the less likely you are to face stress or unexpected expenses.



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## FIND SUPPORT

The holiday season doesn't have to be navigated alone, especially when it comes to managing money. Don't hesitate to share your budget and financial goals with family and friends. Setting expectations early—whether it's limiting gift exchanges or agreeing on a shared experience rather than material gifts, it can significantly reduce pressure and stress. If you're hosting a gathering, consider asking others to contribute to food or drinks to help offset the cost. Sharing responsibilities can help spread the financial load and make the season more enjoyable for everyone.

Additionally, if you're feeling overwhelmed, having a support system in place will make it easier to stick to your financial goals and reduce the stress of holiday spending. Counselling can help you set realistic goals, establish healthy boundaries, and address the stress that often comes with holiday spending. When you're feeling stressed, it can be difficult to think clearly, plan effectively, or negotiate with others. We have specialised clinicians available to support you in making the most of your holiday season, as well as Financial Coaches who can assist with budgeting and planning to help you stay on track.



# FINANCIAL COACHING

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## WHAT IS FINANCIAL COACHING?

The holiday season is here and at Acacia we want to remind you of Acacia's Financial Coaching service designed to support individuals. An accredited Financial Coach can support you with confidential, solution-focused support and personalised guidance to enhance your financial wellbeing throughout the holidays and into the new year.

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## A CLOSER LOOK

Our experienced Financial Coaches can help individuals navigate a variety of financial challenges that may be present during the holidays:

- **Budgeting**
- **Debt Management**
- **Credit Scores**
- **Loans**
- **Superannuation**

Financial Coaching is not limited to a time of year. Big or small, if you have concerns about money these holidays, don't hesitate to reach out and seek support!





*“NO ACT OF  
KINDNESS, NO  
MATTER HOW  
SMALL, IS EVER  
WASTED.”*

AESOP



# LONELINESS AND GRIEF

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The holiday season is often seen as a time for family gatherings, festive celebrations, and connection. However, for many people, it can also bring feelings of intense loneliness. Whether it's due to distance from loved ones, personal challenges, or the absence of family members, feelings of isolation can be particularly heightened during this time.

Grief and loss, especially, can make the holidays a difficult time to navigate. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, the end of a relationship, or even the absence of long-standing holiday traditions, the emptiness left behind can feel especially pronounced when the rest of the world seems to be celebrating. Understanding why loneliness and grief can be particularly challenging during the holidays and finding ways to cope with these experiences is important for maintaining emotional wellbeing.

## Why Loneliness and Grief Feel Stronger During the Holidays

The holidays often amplify feelings of loneliness for several reasons. For one, there is significant social pressure to be surrounded by family or friends, and the idealised portrayal of the season in movies, TV shows, social media, and advertisements can make those who are alone feel even more isolated.

The absence of loved ones due to death, separation, or distance can deepen this sense of isolation, especially when these people were once central to holiday traditions. Grief, whether fresh or longstanding, can make it feel like the world is celebrating without you. The memories of holidays spent with loved ones can create a painful contrast with the current reality of loss, leading to a sense of emptiness.

The pressures of gift-giving, social gatherings, and festive expectations can also trigger feelings of inadequacy or sadness, particularly if you're grieving or dealing with personal challenges. When the focus seems to be on togetherness, it can be easy to feel as if you're missing out or not measuring up, which can amplify feelings of loneliness.



# COPING WITH LONELINESS AND GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

While loneliness and grief can feel especially acute during the holiday season, there are several ways to cope with these emotions:

## 01 CONNECT

If you're feeling lonely or grieving, reaching out to friends, family, or even support groups can provide comfort. Get involved in local holiday activities, meet your neighbours, or join a new community group. If you're physically distant from loved ones, technology allows for meaningful connections through phone calls, video chats, or online messaging. Let others know how you're feeling—they may offer support or may be dealing with similar emotions, making it easier to share experiences.

## 02 ACKNOWLEDGE

If you're grieving the loss of a loved one, it's important to give yourself permission to feel and express your emotions. The holidays can be a particularly emotional time, so don't feel pressured to hide or suppress your feelings. Consider lighting a candle in memory of those you've lost, looking through old photos, or sharing stories about them with family or friends. Honouring the memory of loved ones can help keep their presence alive, even if they're no longer physically with you.

## 03 CARE


Taking care of your physical and emotional health is critical when coping with loneliness and grief. Engage in activities that nurture your wellbeing, such as exercise, spending time in nature, or practicing mindfulness or meditation. Proper sleep, healthy meals, and regular physical activity can have a significant impact on your mood and overall emotional resilience.

## 04 CONTRIBUTE

Contributing can be a powerful way to combat loneliness and create new connections during the holidays. By giving back, whether in your community or with a charity, you can find a sense of purpose and create bonds with others. Helping those who are also struggling with loneliness can foster a sense of community and remind you that you're not alone in your feelings.

## 05 SUPPORT

We have EAP professionals available 24/7 to help you better manage your feelings of loneliness, sadness, loss, or grief that may arise for you over this period.



*“YOU DON’T HAVE  
TO SEE THE WHOLE  
STAIRCASE, JUST  
TAKE THE FIRST  
STEP.”*

MARTIN LUTHER KING

# SELF-CARE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

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The holiday season in Australia is often seen as a time for family, relaxation, and celebration, but it can also bring stress, over-commitment, and burnout. The pressures of holiday shopping, social gatherings, and managing family expectations can make it easy to forget about your own well-being. Prioritising self-care during this time is not only vital for maintaining physical and mental health, but it also ensures that you can fully enjoy the holidays without feeling overwhelmed.


For many Australians, the holiday season can be a time of heightened stress. A 2022 survey by the Australian Psychological Society (APS) revealed that **38% of Australians** reported feeling more stressed during the holiday period, with the main sources of stress being financial pressure, social expectations, and time management. Beyondblue, Australia's leading mental health organisation, reports that the holidays can exacerbate anxiety and depression, especially for those dealing with loneliness, grief, or financial strain.

In addition to emotional stress, the holiday season can effect physical health. A study by the University of Melbourne found that over-indulgence in food, alcohol, and a lack of physical activity during the holidays can lead to weight gain and poorer overall health.

Moreover, sleep disruptions and increased stress can further weaken the immune system, making you more susceptible to illness. Focusing on self-care during this time is essential for maintaining your emotional and physical wellbeing.

One key strategy to prioritise your self-care is setting boundaries and managing expectations. The holiday season is often packed with social obligations that can feel overwhelming, especially when trying to please everyone. According to the Australian Psychological Society's 2021 Stress and Wellbeing report, Australians frequently report feeling overwhelmed during the holiday period due to the pressures of family gatherings, gift-giving, and financial concerns. By learning to say "no" when necessary, you can reduce stress and prioritize your own needs. It's also important to communicate openly with loved ones about your feelings, especially if you need space or flexibility around plans. Creating a simple schedule can help you track your commitments and allow for moments of rest amidst the festivities.





In addition to setting boundaries, mindfulness and stress-reduction techniques are powerful tools for staying calm. Research conducted by Mindful Aus in 2020 found that mindfulness practices can reduce anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and increase resilience.

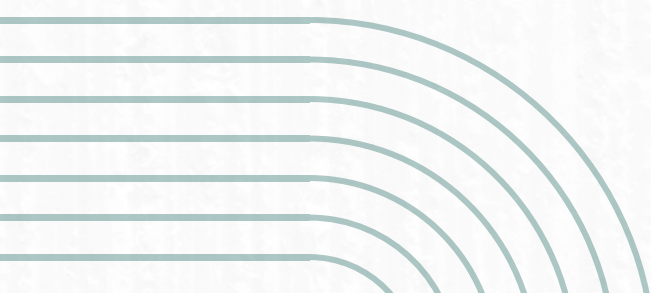
Mindful breathing exercises, such as the "4-7-8" technique, help calm your nervous system and reduce stress. Starting or ending the day with a gratitude journal can also shift focus away from anxiety, helping to boost mood and reduce stress. Practicing mindful eating is another way to stay grounded during the holiday season. By savouring each bite and focusing on the taste and texture of your food, you can avoid overeating while enhancing the enjoyment of your meals. Additionally, mindfulness apps like Smiling Mind, Insight Timer, and Headspace can support you in maintaining a regular practice.

Amid the holiday celebrations, staying active and prioritising sleep are also crucial components of self-care. A 2021 survey by Fitness Australia found that **50% of Australians** do less physical activity during the holiday period, often due to time constraints or exhaustion. Physical inactivity can lead to weight gain, lower energy levels, and increased stress. Regular exercise, even if it's just a short walk or swim, helps reduce stress hormones and boosts mood-enhancing endorphins.

Sleep is equally important, as many Australians experience disruptions to their sleep patterns during the holidays. Research from The Sleep Health Foundation shows that many adults get less than the recommended 7–9 hours of sleep per night, which can lead to irritability, decreased cognitive function, and a weakened immune system. Establishing a relaxing bedtime routine, limiting screen time, and spending time outdoors can help improve sleep quality and reset your circadian rhythm.

The holiday season in Australia is also filled with tempting foods and drinks, but maintaining a balanced diet is key to staying healthy and energised. A study from The University of Queensland found that poor dietary habits, such as overeating processed foods or consuming too much alcohol, can negatively affect mental health. Diets high in sugar and refined carbohydrates are linked to increased anxiety and depression, while a balanced diet can improve mood and overall wellbeing. While it's fine to indulge occasionally, focusing on moderation is important.

Drink alcohol in moderation, alternate alcoholic beverages with water, and include nutrient-rich foods like vegetables, lean meats, and fresh salads in your meals. Staying hydrated is also essential if you're consuming alcohol or indulging in salty foods, particularly during the summer heat, as dehydration can exacerbate fatigue and irritability.





While the holidays are often a time for connecting with others, it's equally important to carve out space for yourself. Research from Beyond Blue suggests that loneliness and isolation can be particularly challenging for some Australians during the holidays.

Taking time to recharge can help reduce stress and maintain your energy levels. Scheduling quiet time, such as taking a walk or enjoying a bath, can help you recharge. Practising gratitude regularly by reflecting on what you're thankful for can also boost mental clarity and improve your mood. Engaging in a hobby you enjoy, whether it's painting, gardening, or listening to music, can bring joy and relaxation during the festive season.

If the pressures of the holidays feel overwhelming, don't hesitate to seek support. According to Lifeline Australia, calls to their helpline increase during this period, often due to loneliness, family conflict, or financial stress. Talking to a trusted friend, family member, or mental health professional can provide emotional relief. If you're struggling to manage your feelings or you're feeling isolated, consider reaching out to mental health professionals.

At Acacia, we have a range of qualified and experienced EAP Professionals available **24/7** through the holiday season who can provide counselling and mental health support.

By embracing these self-care strategies, you can navigate the holiday season with a sense of calm and balance, ensuring that the festive period is both healthy and enjoyable.

# EAP COUNSELLING

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## What is EAP Counselling?

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free, confidential mental health and wellbeing support. It is offered as an employee benefit to individuals.

EAP counselling is a short-term, solution-focused model that aims to assist individuals in overcoming life's challenges and return them to a better state of wellbeing. Together with an experienced EAP Professional, individuals explore the issue and develop strategies to manage or change the situation.

## What Can I Access For?

Individuals can access support for any personal or work-related concern. This includes, but is not limited to, mental illness, anxiety and stress, relationship concerns, family and parenting issues, grief and loss, eating disorders, and domestic and family violence.

Individuals can also access EAP to build resilience, increase work performance, develop leadership skills, support yourself during life changes, or even improve their general wellbeing. No matter the need, our team of EAP Professionals will work to support your people on their wellbeing journey.

## Is EAP Counselling Confidential?

Although an EAP is an employee benefit, Acacia is an independent third party committed to maintaining client confidentiality. Information about your people's support remains confidential. Details are never disclosed without the client's written consent.

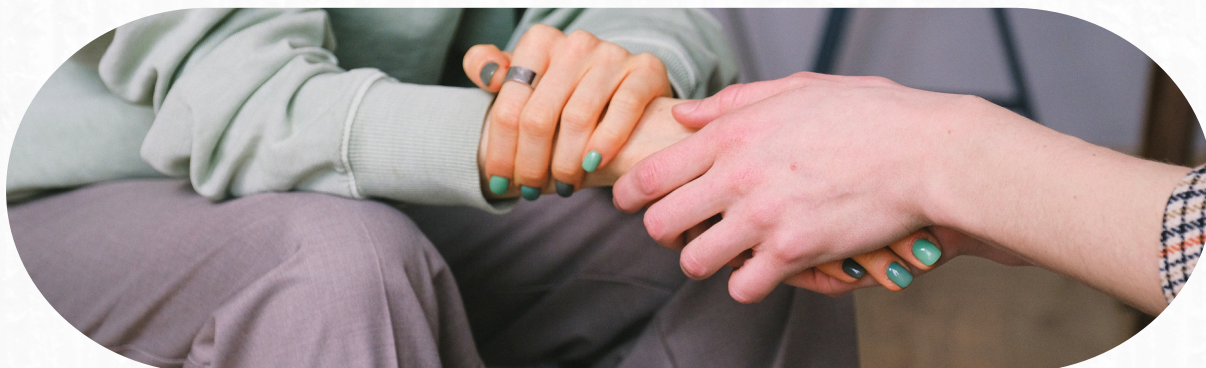
## Who Provides EAP Counselling?

Acacia carefully selects EAP Professionals who are experienced, approachable, and highly professional to ensure your people receive the best support available. Our team of Psychologists, Social Workers, and Counsellors have a minimum of five years of experience and speak more than 50 languages combined.

## Where can I have my Appointment?

Acacia has a network of highly qualified, registered EAP Professionals across Australia, New Zealand, and internationally. We aim to offer assistance in a convenient location close to where your people work or live. We also have many accessible offices, such as for individuals with physical disabilities.

Individuals can also opt for a telephone, video, or live chat session.





*“RESILIENCE IS NOT  
ABOUT  
OVERCOMING, BUT  
BECOMING.”*

SHERRI MANDELL

# HOLIDAY EATING

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## **AVOID RESTRICTING PRIOR**

Often when we have big social events coming up we think we need to restrict our eating prior to “save room”. This in fact is not a good idea, as you are much more likely to make “unhealthy” decisions with your food choices, and portion sizes when you are hungry. Our body when it is deprived from nutrients during the day goes into a little “survival mode” making those sugar cravings intensified or increase the want to go back for seconds.

## **PORTION CONTROL**

When it comes to portion control it is important to not deprive yourself from what the “heart really wants”. Eating “fun foods” or traditional Christmas ham or Christmas pudding is important part of social and emotional health. Allowing yourself on this special day to have a “try” or share with someone the foods you enjoy can be helpful in not over portioning or “eating with your eyes” some people like to say.

Another thing to do when you plate up your main meal is ensure you include adequate protein and fibre options (such as vegetables or salads). This will keep your body nourished and satisfied. Another helpful tool is using mindful eating strategies such as chewing on your food for 10 seconds, pausing between mouthfuls, and reflecting on taste, and texture.



## **GRAZING BOARDS**

Let's face it, there is nothing better than snacking on a grazing board while lunch is being prepared.

Consider bringing your own that is slightly more nutrient-dense by adding fruit, unsalted nuts and seeds, whole grain crackers, and veggie sticks with hummus.

Aim for a nutrient-dense main meals with high protein and fibre to limit the grazing for the remainder of the day.

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# HOLIDAY EATING

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## SWEET TEMPTATIONS

Give yourself permission to indulge in that Sticky Christmas Pudding, Eggnog, or Gingerbread Cookies. Doing this will firstly remove that sensation of guilt or shame and give you the freedom to enjoy delicious food with your friends and family.

Ensure you have eaten a nutrient-dense meal prior to ensure you are already feeling relatively satisfied.

Consider pairing dessert with some Greek yoghurt or fruit to help reduce hunger hormones.

## ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

It's very common for alcohol intake to increase around the holiday season. It is highly recommended that you try reducing your alcohol intake to no more than four standards in one sitting.

Remember to have glasses of water in between drinks to ensure hydrated.

Consider bringing alternative, non-alcoholic drinks. Change it up from regular water to still feel in the festive spirit, such as Kombucha, a lime and soda water, or a cup of tea.



# PHYSICAL WELLBEING CONSIDERATIONS

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Some other considerations over Christmas celebrations, is to ensure you maintain physical wellbeing. During this period there often is a lot of sedentary activities, stress, and indulgence. Below are some ways to ensure you maintain your wellness.



## MOVEMENT

**Go for walks:** Take a walk after meals to aid digestion and get some fresh air. It's a great way to keep moving without overexerting yourself.

**Incorporate family activities:** If you're spending time with loved ones, organize a fun activity like a family lawn bowls, tennis or even ping pong matches.

**Exercise routine:** Try to maintain your regular exercise routine even if it is less than usual. Whether that be a gym class, yoga or a quick run.

**Stretch often:** Long periods of sitting at the table or by the TV can stiffen your body. Stretch your legs, arms, and back regularly.

## SLEEP HYGEINE

- **Stick to a routine:** The holiday season can create confusion to your circadian rhythm, with later sleep-ins and later nights.
- **Create a relaxing bedtime ritual:** Reducing stimulants such as caffeine and technology close to bedtime. Instead, putting on some meditation, reading a book or doing some gentle night time yoga before bed.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

**Practice mindfulness or meditation:** The holiday season can bring its own kind of stress, whether it's about presents, food, or family. A few minutes of mindfulness, deep breathing, or meditation can help lower stress levels.

**Boundaries:** It's okay to say no to activities or events that might feel overwhelming or that you're not interested in. Make sure you're prioritizing your own well-being.

**Ground yourself in the present moment:** Instead of stressing over the perfect celebration, focus on enjoying time with loved ones and savoring the present moment.

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# NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT

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## WHAT IS A DIETITIAN AND HOW CAN THEY HELP?

Our Dietitians are go-to sources for credible advice and can translate scientific information into practical recommendations. Our dietitians use a holistic approach alongside evidence-based practice to fully understand your unique situation.

Our dietitians can support you with any nutritional concern these holiday's:

- Support with meal planning.
- Improve relationship with food and body.
- Learn fun and nutritional recipes to share with family and friends.
- Have support throughout the holiday period.

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## A CLOSER LOOK

Dietitians can offer practical and emotional support regarding the following:

- Chronic disease management (e.g., Diabetes, Cardiovascular, high cholesterol, and blood pressure)
- Food intolerances and allergies (e.g., IBS, gut health, coeliac disease)
- Eating disorders and healing relationship with food
- Weight management (weight gain, or weight loss)
- Malnutrition & low appetite

- Sports and performance nutrition (endurance or resistance)
- Women's health (PCOS, Endometriosis, Menopause)
- General healthy eating and meal planning support
- Mental health
- Neurodivergent Individuals (ADHD, ASD)

If you have any concerns these holidays reach out to Acacia to learn how we can support you these holidays and get you set up for a healthier and happier year ahead.

# EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE



The holiday season in Australia is often seen as a time for celebration and connection, but for many, it can also bring up a mix of difficult emotions, including loneliness, grief, and loss. These emotions, compounded by the usual stresses of family expectations, financial pressure, and social obligations, can make the festive period feel overwhelming rather than joyful. For individuals who are grieving the loss of a loved one, experiencing relationship challenges, or dealing with feelings of isolation, the holidays can amplify these struggles. Practising emotional awareness and acceptance during this time can help individuals navigate these complex emotions, fostering greater emotional resilience and providing a sense of peace amid the season's challenges.

## **What Is Emotional Awareness and Acceptance?**

Emotional awareness involves recognising and understanding our emotions as they arise.

It's about paying attention to our feelings—whether they are positive or negative—without judgment. When we are emotionally aware, we can identify the specific emotions we're experiencing (e.g., joy, frustration, anxiety, sadness) and understand the triggers that are influencing those feelings.

Emotional acceptance, on the other hand, is the practice of allowing emotions to exist without trying to deny, suppress, or change them. This means accepting that emotions are a natural part of being human and that all emotions, even difficult ones, have value. Acceptance doesn't mean liking or endorsing negative emotions but recognising that they are temporary and part of the human experience.

Together, emotional awareness and acceptance form the foundation of emotional regulation. When we're aware of our emotions and accept them, we're less likely to be overwhelmed by them. This enables us to make thoughtful choices rather than reacting impulsively, leading to healthier emotional outcomes.

#### The Importance of Emotional Awareness and Acceptance During the Holidays

For many people, the holiday period can trigger a mix of emotions. Family gatherings can bring both warmth and tension, and while the festive season is generally viewed as a time of joy, it can also highlight feelings of loneliness, grief, or financial stress. In fact, a study by Lifeline Australia found that emotional distress peaks during the holidays, with more Australians reaching out for help due to heightened feelings of stress, depression, or anxiety.

Rather than avoiding or denying these emotions, practising emotional awareness and acceptance allows individuals to better manage these feelings, respond thoughtfully to difficult situations, and maintain a sense of balance during a hectic time.

Numerous studies have shown that emotional awareness and acceptance are associated with improved mental health and emotional well-being. A landmark study by Hayes et al. (2006) found that emotional acceptance is linked to reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. The research shows that when we allow ourselves to experience emotions fully, without trying to suppress or escape them, we are more likely to experience psychological flexibility, which in turn leads to better emotional regulation.

In the Australian context, research by Beyond Blue has found that one in five Australians experiences mental health challenges during the holidays, particularly when dealing with personal loss, financial strain, or the pressures of social expectations. Emotional awareness and acceptance can help individuals cope more effectively by allowing them to acknowledge their feelings and reduce the impact of stressors. A study by Australian National University (2021) also highlighted that emotional acceptance is a key factor in improving overall life satisfaction, especially in high-stress situations, like the holiday season.



# EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

And how they can help you these holidays

## Managing Holiday Stress and Expectations

The holidays often come with heightened expectations—whether it's the pressure to give the perfect gift, host the ideal family gathering, or meet unrealistic standards of happiness. This can create a sense of anxiety or inadequacy, especially when things don't go as planned.

**Emotional awareness** allows you to recognise feelings of frustration or anxiety early on. For example, if you feel overwhelmed by holiday shopping or family obligations, recognising that emotion allows you to pause and evaluate how to best respond to the situation. Instead of reacting impulsively—perhaps by overcommitting or stressing out—you can make a more informed choice that honours your emotional needs.

**Emotional acceptance** helps by allowing you to accept that feelings of stress or disappointment are part of the process and that they don't define your holiday experience. Accepting that you can't control everything means you're more likely to let go of perfectionism and embrace the imperfections of the season. This shift in mindset can reduce anxiety and help you approach the holidays with more flexibility and peace.

## Coping with Loneliness or Grief

For many Australians, the holiday season can be a difficult time due to loneliness or the absence of loved ones. The expectations of happiness can amplify feelings of sadness or isolation.

**Emotional awareness** is particularly helpful here, as it allows individuals to identify when they are feeling lonely, sad, or grief-stricken, rather than ignoring or suppressing these emotions. This makes it easier to address the emotion and seek support if necessary.

**Emotional acceptance** involves acknowledging these difficult feelings without judgment. Rather than feeling guilty or frustrated for feeling lonely or sad, acceptance allows you to hold space for these emotions. It also creates room for self-compassion, allowing you to be kinder to yourself during tough times. This approach has been shown to improve emotional resilience and reduce feelings of shame or self-criticism associated with difficult emotions.



## Managing Family Dynamics and Conflict

Family gatherings are often a focal point of the holiday season. However, they can also bring about conflict, misunderstandings, or frustration, especially when dealing with unresolved family tensions. **Emotional awareness** helps you stay attuned to your feelings and identify triggers that might lead to conflict or emotional upset. For example, if a particular family member's behaviour causes you stress, being emotionally aware of your reactions helps you stay calm and avoid reacting impulsively.

**Emotional acceptance** is key in these situations. Rather than trying to "fix" the tension or avoid uncomfortable conversations, emotional acceptance helps you accept that discomfort is part of the human experience. This can help reduce the intensity of your emotions, allowing you to approach difficult family dynamics with a greater sense of calm and compassion.

## Enhancing Enjoyment and Mindfulness

The holidays are also a time to celebrate and create happy memories, but it's easy to get caught up in the chaos and miss out on the present moment.

**Emotional awareness** allows you to tune into your emotions, making it easier to notice when you're feeling joy, gratitude, or excitement. This awareness helps you savour these positive emotions, deepening your enjoyment of the holiday experience.

By practising **emotional acceptance**, you can also reduce the urge to judge or critique your emotions. For instance, instead of focusing on what went wrong or what you didn't get to do, acceptance allows you to fully experience the joy of being present with loved ones, even if there are minor hiccups along the way. This mindfulness approach has been linked to better mood regulation and increased satisfaction in life.



# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR CULTIVATING EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE:



## **Check-in with yourself regularly:**

Throughout the holiday season, take a few moments each day to pause and check in with your emotions. Ask yourself, “What am I feeling right now?” and “What might be causing this feeling?” By naming your emotions, you can begin to understand their source and decide how to best respond.

## **Practice self-compassion:**

If you’re feeling stressed or sad, remind yourself that these feelings are valid and part of the human experience. Be kind to yourself, and avoid self-criticism.

## **Use mindfulness techniques:**

Engage in simple mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing, meditation, or mindful walking, to increase your awareness of your emotions and help you stay grounded during emotionally intense moments.

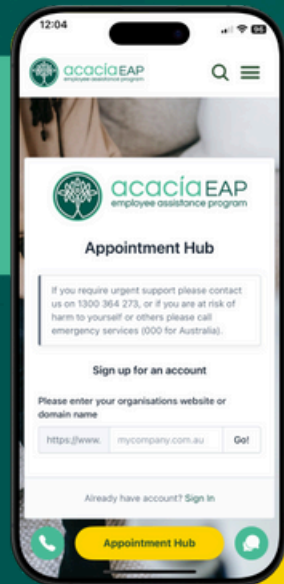
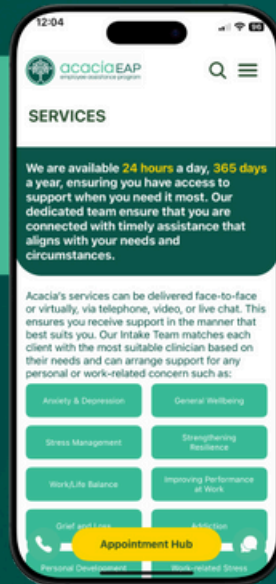
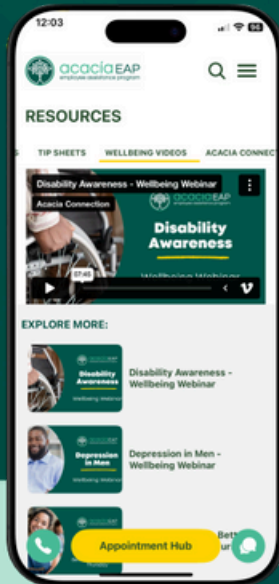
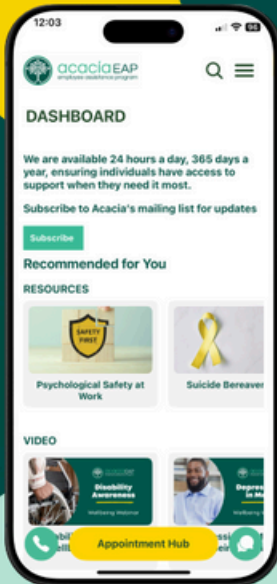
## **Accept what you can’t control:**

The holidays rarely go exactly as planned. Practice accepting that some things may not go perfectly, and that’s okay. This will reduce the pressure you put on yourself and increase your emotional resilience.

## **Seek support when needed:**

If you’re struggling with difficult emotions, don’t hesitate to reach out to a friend, family member, or mental health professional. At Acacia, we offer access to a team of qualified and experienced EAP professionals who are available 24/7 throughout the holiday season to provide counselling and mental health support.

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Our Appointment Hub platform will also be available to book in support every day over the holiday period.



# CONTACT US

1300 364 273 (AUS)  
0800 000 657 (NZ)

[www.acaciaconnection.com](http://www.acaciaconnection.com)  
[info@acaciaconnection.com](mailto:info@acaciaconnection.com)

