Your Health

Health Partners

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Have a sustainable Christmas:

Practical ways to make the season more manageable

& Making meditation a habit

A calmer, more sustainable Christmas:

Protecting your wellbeing during the festive season

While December can be a joyful time, for many people it also brings a lot of pressure. Alongside the excitement and celebrations can come additional demands on our time, energy, attention and finances. There may be end-of-year work deadlines to meet, family commitments and expectations to manage, social events to attend, presents to buy and travel and hosting arrangements to figure out.

The planning, organising and decision-making that go into creating the 'perfect' Christmas, together with a general sense of needing to have everything 'wrapped up' ready for the new year, can create a significant mental load that often goes unnoticed. Even plans we are looking forward to can start to feel like an unwelcome burden when they come on top of an already busy schedule.

If thoughts of the festive season already have you feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone. The good news is that a few small changes can help it feel less stressful, more manageable and, ultimately, more enjoyable.

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Why Christmas can feel unsustainable

Christmas can begin to feel unsustainable when expectations grow beyond what we can realistically manage.

It's all too easy to become focused on what we think we should be doing.

The pressure to attend every festive event, maintain every family tradition, find the perfect gifts, keep everyone happy and somehow fit it all around everyday responsibilities can quickly add up.

All these competing priorities, combined with disrupted routines and worries about overspending, can contribute to increased stress, irritability and fatigue. As a result, many people reach the end of the holiday period feeling exhausted rather than rested and refreshed, as though they need another break to recover.



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What a **more balanced** approach to Christmas can look like



A calmer Christmas doesn't have to mean cancelling plans or avoiding festivities altogether. Instead, it means recognising that your time, energy and attention are limited resources and making conscious choices about how you use them, rather than simply doing things out of habit, a sense of obligation or a need to keep up with everyone else.

For a lot of us, social events, traditions and family gatherings are important sources of connection and enjoyment. So, the aim isn't to do less for the sake of it, but to reduce the pressure to do everything.

Here are some simple ways to put this more sustainable approach into practice.

Make more intentional choices

While individual festive activities and events might be fun, having too many packed together can be draining, leaving little time to recharge. Choosing fewer commitments, agreeing plans early and building quieter moments in between can help prevent the feeling of constantly rushing from one obligation to the next.



Focus on what matters most

Many of us fall into the trap of thinking Christmas needs to be bigger, busier or more elaborate each year, but it can be helpful to take a step back and question where these expectations come from. They often stem from advertising, images we're presented with online or in the media, or from comparing our plans with those of friends, family and colleagues. Instead of following other people's ideas of how Christmas should be, try to think about the experiences and traditions that genuinely matter to you. By focusing your time, energy and money on these, you can reduce unnecessary stress (and spending) and create more space to enjoy the season.





Don’t forget the new year

How we spend the holidays can have a significant impact on how we feel when the new year begins. Taking proper time to rest can help you return to work feeling more refreshed and energised, while being mindful of your spending can help prevent money worries following you into January.

Small choices that can make Christmas feel less overwhelming

- Let go of the idea that Christmas has to look a certain way and give yourself permission to keep things simple.
- Choose two or three traditions or experiences that feel most meaningful to you and allow the rest to be optional.
- Only say yes to invites or requests that feel comfortable, affordable and manageable for you.
- Plan recovery time between social commitments, particularly during busy working weeks.
- Share responsibilities rather than taking on all the planning, organising and emotional labour.
- Set a realistic budget – and stick to it.

Above all, try not to judge the success of Christmas by how much you do and whether everything has gone exactly to plan. It doesn’t have to be perfect to be rewarding, and a more balanced approach can help it feel more manageable and enjoyable.



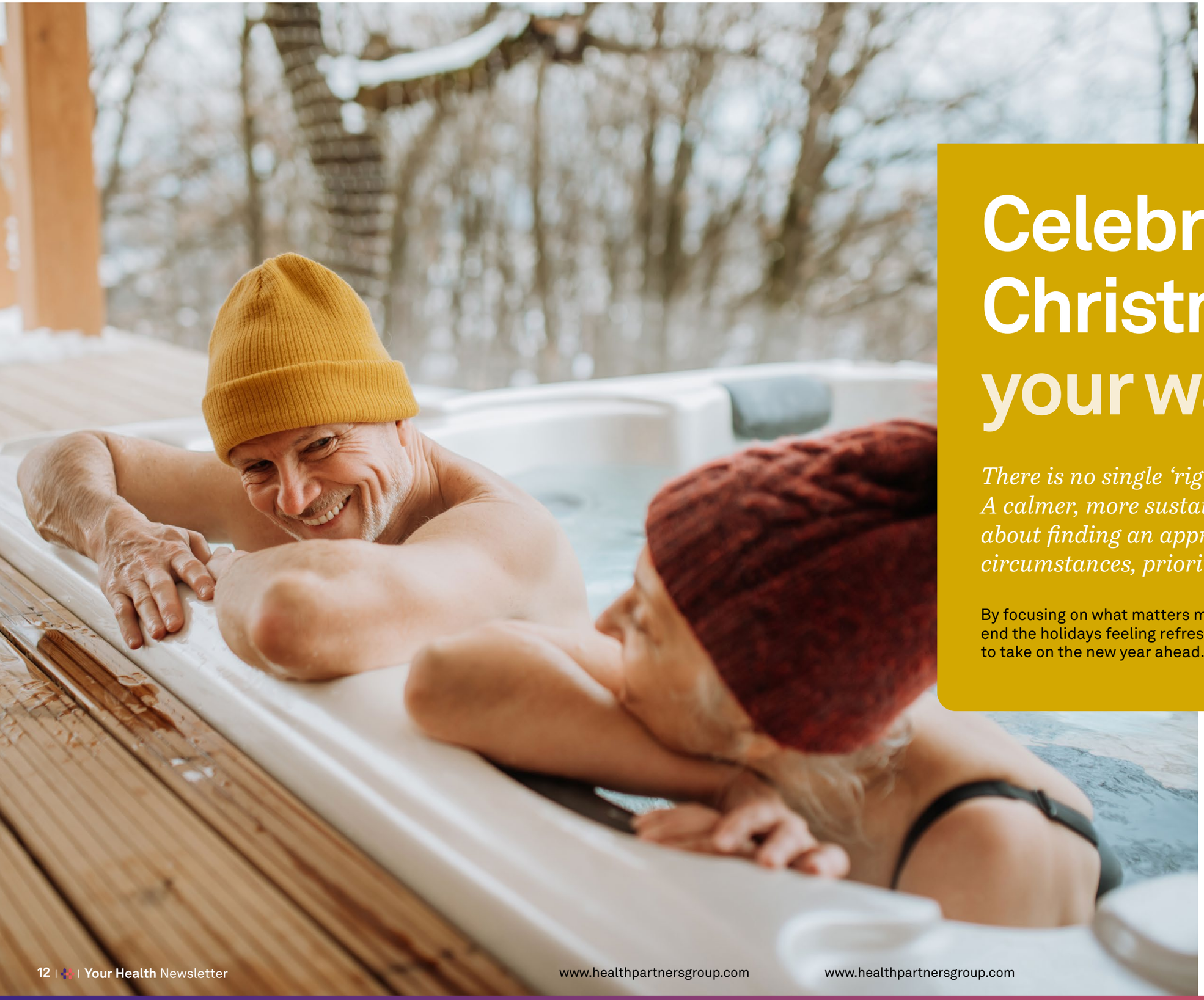
Looking after yourself

When life becomes busier, it's often the basics that get pushed aside first. But keeping up regular healthy habits can make a significant difference to wellbeing, especially at this time of year, helping you maintain your energy levels and cope better with festive demands.

Try to keep eating regular meals and maintain some balance alongside the festive food and drink, get outside for some fresh air and exercise when you can, and aim for adequate sleep where possible.

It can also help to recognise that Christmas is not a positive experience for everyone. Some people may be navigating bereavement, loneliness, financial difficulties, caring responsibilities, health concerns or complex family relationships. If the season feels difficult, try to be kind to yourself, avoid comparing your experience with others, and reach out to friends, family or support services if you need additional help or simply some human connection.





Celebrate Christmas your way

There is no single 'right' way to do Christmas. A calmer, more sustainable festive season is about finding an approach that works for your circumstances, priorities and wellbeing.

By focusing on what matters most and letting go of the rest, you can end the holidays feeling refreshed rather than depleted and ready to take on the new year ahead.

Could *meditation* be your new healthy habit?



Amid all the busyness of the festive season, finding time to pause isn't always easy. Yet taking even a few minutes to slow down and refocus can have a positive effect on how we feel, particularly if we're feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

Meditation can be an effective way of building these moments of pause into daily life, helping us to feel calmer and more grounded. While it can be especially valuable at Christmas, it's a practice that can support wellbeing all year round. If you're thinking about healthy habits for the new year, meditation might be one worth exploring.

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What is meditation?

Meditation refers to a range of practices that involve intentionally focusing attention and developing greater awareness of thoughts, feelings or physical sensations.

Many people think that meditation is about sitting still and silent for long periods, clearing the mind completely or achieving a state of total calm. While it can sometimes look like this, it doesn't have to.

You do not need to be good at relaxing to meditate, nor do you need special equipment or lots of free time. You can do it anywhere you feel comfortable, whether that's at your desk, lying in bed or sitting in the garden, and sessions can be as short as a few minutes. This flexibility makes meditation a realistic option even for people with busy schedules.



How meditation can support wellbeing

Many people find that meditation helps them to better cope with everyday pressures and challenges, creating a regular opportunity to check in with themselves. Research suggests mindfulness-based approaches to meditation can also support aspects of mental wellbeing.

Benefits can include:

Greater emotional awareness

Meditation encourages us to notice thoughts, feelings and physical sensations as they arise, which can help us become more aware of our emotional responses. This greater awareness can make it easier to recognise early signs of stress, frustration or fatigue before they build up.

Better stress regulation

Becoming more aware of our emotions and what's happening in the moment can make it easier to step back in situations that make us feel stressed or anxious. This allows us to gain perspective and respond more thoughtfully, rather than reacting automatically or instinctually in response to clouding worrisome thoughts, for example about the past or the future.

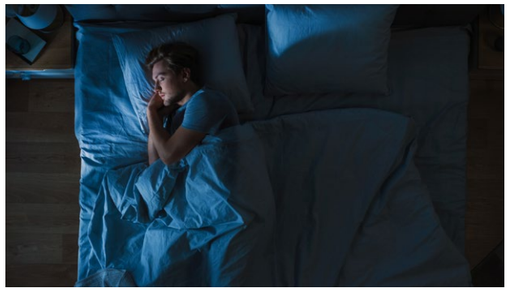
Improved focus and attention

By repeatedly bringing attention back to the breath, the body or another point of focus, meditation can help train concentration and reduce the feeling of mental clutter. This can make it easier to stay in the present moment, allowing us to step out of 'autopilot' or 'fight or flight' mode and approach each task with greater focus and intention.

Improved ability to relax

Some people find that meditation helps them wind down and better prepare for sleep by shifting attention away from the busyness of the day.

The benefits of meditation are often gradual (with regular practising) and vary from person to person, which is why it is best viewed as one tool within a broader wellbeing routine alongside habits such as regular movement, good sleep hygiene, social connection and taking time to rest.





How to make *meditation* a habit

For meditation to become a habit, it needs to feel easy enough to do regularly. Rather than aiming for perfection, try these tips to help build consistency.

Attach it to an existing routine

Linking meditation to something you already do, such as making your morning drink, closing down your computer after work or getting ready for bed, can provide a cue to practise.

Keep the goal small

Start with a few minutes a day and build from there if you want to. Aiming for consistency rather than duration can reduce pressure and make the habit feel more achievable. A short five- to 10-minute meditation practised regularly is often more beneficial than committing to an ambitious routine that quickly becomes difficult to maintain.

Don’t worry if your mind wanders

Wandering thoughts are not a sign that meditation is going wrong. Noticing when your attention has drifted and gently bringing it back is all part of the process, so don’t be discouraged if you struggle to maintain focus at first. The more you practise, the easier it will become.

Use support if it helps

Some people prefer silence, while others find guided meditations or short audio prompts easier to follow. There is no single right way to meditate, so do what works for you and be open to trying different things.

Keep it flexible

On busy days, when a longer meditation session isn’t possible, try doing a shorter version instead using one of the techniques described below, whether it’s a few minutes of breath awareness or a quick body scan. And don’t worry if you miss a day. The important thing is returning to the practice when you can, rather than seeing it as an all-or-nothing commitment. This prevents meditation becoming a chore and makes it easier to sustain in the long term.

Notice the after-effects

After a meditation, it can be useful to reflect on whether anything feels different, even slightly. There may be no dramatic change, but you might notice a little more space, steadiness or awareness and that your breathing and heart rate have slowed. Recognising the benefits of a habit makes it easier to stick with it.

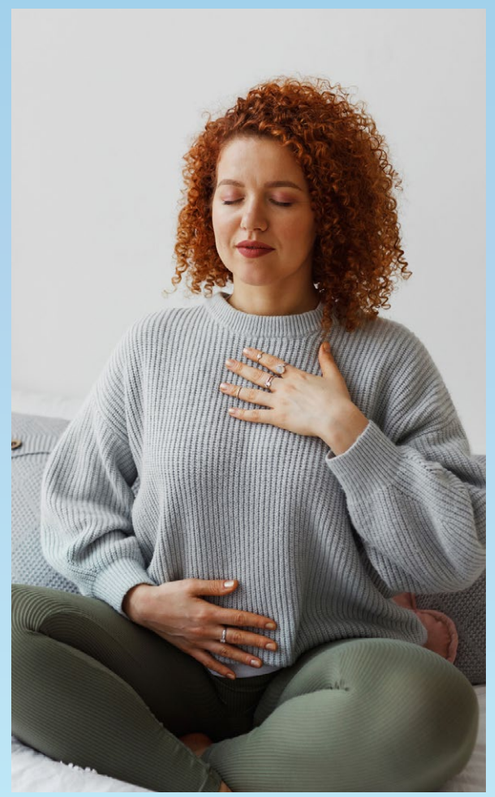
Simple *meditation* techniques to try

There are many different ways to meditate, and it can take a little experimentation to find an approach that feels comfortable. Some people prefer mindfulness-based practices, while others find guided or visualisation-based techniques easier to engage with.

If you're not sure where to begin, the following techniques can provide a useful starting point.

Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation is one of the most common forms of meditation. It involves paying attention to the present moment without judgement. This is often done by focusing on the breath, bodily sensations or sounds around you. If your mind wanders, notice where it has gone and gently bring your attention back.



- **Breath awareness meditation**
  Sit comfortably and focus on the natural rhythm of your breathing. Notice the sensation of each breath as it enters and leaves your body.
- **Body scan meditation**
  Find a comfortable position and slowly move your attention through different parts of your body, beginning at your feet and gradually working upwards. Notice any sensations or areas of tension, discomfort or relaxation without trying to change them. The aim is simply to observe what you feel.

Other meditation approaches

- **Visualisation meditation**
  Close your eyes and imagine a place or scene that feels calm and restorative, such as a beach, forest or quiet garden. Try to engage the senses by noticing what you might see, hear or feel in that environment. If your attention drifts, gently bring it back to the image.
- **Guided meditation**
  Guided meditations are led by an instructor, either in person or through a recording or app. They often provide prompts to help you focus your attention, making them a useful starting point for people who are new to meditation or find it difficult to practise on their own.



It may be helpful to try one technique for a few days rather than switching between lots of different approaches. Repetition helps the practice feel familiar and, over time, your body and mind may learn to recognise it as a cue to slow down, making it easier to draw on during moments of stress.

Finding what works *for you*

Meditation may not be for everyone, but it's definitely worth a try if you're looking for a way to cope better with day-to-day stress, manage racing thoughts and create a little more mental space when life gets busy.

By starting small and meditating in a way that works for you, it can become a valuable and sustainable part of supporting your wellbeing, during the festive season and beyond.



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Resources – Sustainable Christmas

- Christmas and mental health (Mind)
- Navigating your mental load at Christmas (Mental Health UK)
- If you're finding things hard this festive season (Samaritans)
- Saving money for Christmas (MoneyHelper)
- Christmas burnout: why stressed parents find it 'harder to be emotionally honest with children' (The Guardian)

Resources – Meditation

- What is mindfulness, the benefits of mindfulness and how to practise it (Mental Health Foundation)
- The many benefits of meditation (Headspace)
- Mindfulness vs meditation (Calm)
- How to meditate for beginners (NHS Every Mind Matters)

Our Services

At Health Partners, we offer a range of workplace health and wellbeing services that can help support client employees with some of the issues touched on in this edition of Your Health.

To find out more, visit our website healthpartnersgroup.com

