



Why are we all so bloody tired at Christmas time?

TWO TYPES OF CHRISTMAS PEOPLE



It's a week and a half 'til [Christmas](#) and chances are you're either counting down the days until your break or wondering how on earth you're going to get everything done before the [December 25th](#) deadline.

Either way, you're [tired](#).

Don't worry, you're not alone. A quick poll around the *Mamamia* office found most of us were feeling a bit energy-zapped, if not utterly exhausted.

So what is it about [December](#) and Christmas time that makes us so fatigued?

Of course, the short answer is we're all so busy. There are more social engagements, more work deadlines, more things to buy and events to organise than at any other time in the year.

But is it this general busyness alone that's making us so tired? Or is there something more to it?

To find out, we spoke to clinical psychologist, Samantha Clarke from [Mind Body Resilience](#), who said the lack of energy felt at this time of year had as many mental causes as physical ones.

“Generally we get a break over the Christmas-New Year period, but by December we’re so worn down by the running of daily life over the year that December is a lot harder,”

Dr Clarke PhD says.

“But then we add on top of that all the expectations. Things are on a quicker schedule at work, but then we’re also trying to fit in all these social gatherings, plus then trying to be prepared for Christmas.

“And emotionally Christmas can be a hard time for people, so knowing you’re going to spend 10 days with your family, or with your in-laws and there’s tension – that can be a bit of anxiety that adds to that mental load that impacts us around this time.”

Dr Clarke adds this pressure sucks the fun out of things we’d normally enjoy, compounding the issue.

“Even if they’re pleasant things to do – like your week might be filled with your Christmas party, your partner’s Christmas party and buying Christmas presents – you can be feeling this sense of urgency and trying to get things done.”

“Rather than being able to enjoy buying that gift for that person that you love, it feels like an added pressure that’s got to get done within a constrained timeframe.”

What Dr Clarke points out though, is it’s not so much the long list of things you have to do during December, but constantly *thinking* about that [to-do list](#) that is the problem.

“Normally if we’re thinking about a to-do list, we might look at one to five things that are manageable to do in a period of time – that’s kind of psychologically what we’re able to hold.

“But when we get to Christmas and there are all these external factors affecting our to do list... it’s almost like we’re not able to manage that to-do list in the same way, so we can feel overwhelmed, and that’s when anxiety and stress start happening.”

“So it’s not going to the Christmas party, it’s going to the Christmas party and thinking about all the things you’ve still got to get done.”



Enjoy time spent with your friends without thinking about the presents you need to wrap when you get home.

Dr Clarke recommends sitting down to plan (and write down) when and how you're going to buy or arrange things. Then, knowing you have a plan, not allowing yourself to think about all the things that still need to be done, when you aren't in a position to do them.

"When we're with our friends at that gathering anytime our mind goes into 'crap I've still got to do this and this' we let that thought go and come back to being present wherever we are.

"We know if we do that we're not only going to enjoy the moment more, we're not going to get hooked into stress."

Dr Clarke explained that if you devote all your time to thinking about what you've still got to do, you never allow yourself a break to reset, and that constant level of worry develops into accumulative stress.

Of course, some events that could be enjoyable - like a catch-up with the school mums - become a burden when they are taking time away from something essential, like a meal with your loved ones.

This is when Dr Clarke recommends not bowing to the cultural deadline we've created of year's end, and organising to catch-up with people in January or even February or March.

"It's almost like we've got this cultural expectation that [Christmas](#) has been the time when we get together with friends and family and that's been that culturally designated time, and that's linked with that mentality of 'well, we've got to do it now'."

"I think a huge part of why people get stressed is the expectations they put on themselves or they think need to happen at that time of year, rather than being clear on, 'well what's most important to me?'"

"Being able to say no is really important."

And that might mean also saying no to late-nights, less than ideal foods, and skipping the gym.

"If we're [eating foods](#) that are probably going to make us feel a lot more crappy, we're drinking more, we're getting less sleep and we're not doing our exercise - all those things are going to make this time of year even more difficult."

"So trying to prioritise self-care, so that it doesn't go out the window, is going to help people feel not so run-down, burnt out at this time of the year."

Now we know why we're so tired, all that's left is to do something about it. And if you can't, well... it's only a week and a half 'til Christmas.