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Protect your mental health as you say goodbye to 2020

The end of the year can be a very stressful time for many reasons.

In South Africa, **1 in 6 people face a common mental health condition** and over the holiday season the rates increase.

But this year, due to COVID-19 many also have to deal with the loss of loved ones and reduced income. The lockdown also forced many to work from home, leading to longer work hours and fewer social connections.

South Africans who participated in a survey* about the mental health effects of the lockdown indicated they experienced the following emotions:

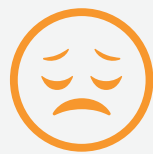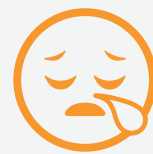| **60%**	**44%**	**43%**	**39%**	**29%**	**26%**
Frequently stressed	Scared	Irritable	Depressed	Sad	Angry

* University of Johannesburg's Centre for Social Change and the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES) research division

3 WAYS TO HELP MANAGE HOLIDAY STRESS

During the upcoming holiday season, you may be tempted to hide from, or ignore, your true feelings of stress, anxiety or depression. However, this can be detrimental to your health.

1. Reach out for help
It can be hard to reach out when you're feeling overwhelmed – especially during the holiday season when it may seem that most people are happy. However, your feelings are always valid.

If you need to talk to someone, you can contact any of the following:
• A family member or friend who you trust.
• A healthcare professional.
• A mental health organisation (such as the South African Depression and Anxiety Group – their services are available during the holidays).

2. Budget
Finances are one of the main stressors during the holiday period. A survey found that:

51%	**28%**
felt pressured to spend more than they are comfortable with on gifts	were worried about money for social gatherings

Set a budget to help manage any financial stress:
• **Make a gift list:** Make a list of everyone who 'needs' a present and stick to it.
• **Try making presents:** Your loved ones will appreciate the effort.
• **Keep track of spending:** So you know how far you can go.
• **Use the 24-hour rule:** If you find something expensive, think it over for 24 hours before making the purchase.

3. Don't overcommit
It's the holidays and you'll want to spend time with family and friends – especially as lockdown restrictions prevented social connections. However, to prevent overcommitting:
• Remember that you can say no – if you don't want to go, don't.
• Try to socialise within your own time constraints e.g. twice a week.
• Plan time for rest.

Don't hide how you're really feeling because it's the holidays. 2020 has been a unique and stressful year, and managing your mental health over this period will help you to welcome 2021 on a healthier and happier note.

References
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