

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MENTAL HEALTH STUDY SHOWS CANADIANS NEED A BREAK FROM THEIR CHRISTMAS BREAK

Vancouver, Canada – A significant new Canadian study indicates that financial pressures coupled with the strain of “doing more” during the holiday season are placing already stressed Canadians under considerable more strain. The comprehensive two-part study, which focused on understanding winter holiday-triggered stress, anxiety and depression symptoms, polled mental health consumers and family members as well as doctors from across the country. The poll was conducted by MD Analytics, Canada’s most innovative healthcare research firm, on behalf of the Canadian Mental Health Association, National (CMHA-NAT) in partnership with Desjardins Financial Security (DFS).

The consumer study sourced insights from people diagnosed with anxiety or depression, as well as those who experience stress, anxiety or depression symptoms during the winter holiday season.

“We’ve known for some time that December and January are extremely stressful months, but what we didn’t know was how far-reaching the effects of holiday stress would be,” says CMHA-NAT Chief Executive Officer Glenn Thompson, MSW, RSW. “This is the first time researchers have quantified winter holiday season-related stress anxiety and the occurrence of depression symptoms.”

The study showed that added social pressure, financial stress, raised holiday expectations, an increased feeling of loneliness, increased family interaction and the “commercialization of the winter holiday season” topped the list as catalysts for holiday-related stress and anxiety, potentially leading to a diagnosis of anxiety or depression. The study also indicated that a staggering 76.6 percent of people who have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression experience a return or exacerbation of their symptoms during the winter holiday season.

One positive finding in the Holiday Mental Fitness study on holiday-triggered stress and anxiety symptoms shows that the survey respondents with an anxiety or depression diagnosis believe that attitudes are changing when it comes to the social stigma surrounding the use of anti-depressant medication.

73.1 percent of respondents who pursue additional stress coping strategies during the winter holiday season agreed that the prescribed use of anti-depressant or anti-anxiety medication was more socially acceptable than it was five years ago. This could signal the commencement of a general shift in thinking towards the treatment of mental illness in this country.

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Noting that the results of the last national health survey of Canadians indicate that financial worries undermine the quality of workers' lives and provoke stress, anxiety and even depression, Denis Berthiaume, Senior Vice-President, Individual Insurance for Desjardins Financial Security, emphasizes the importance of taking advantage of the assistance services available during this period of the year.

“In addition to the distress it causes the person who is experiencing the problem, an individual's physical and mental health disorders can have a significant impact on others, such as colleagues in the workplace, family members and friends. People should be aware that solutions are available to help them overcome stress, financial insecurities and uncertainties. They should not hesitate to seek out these services if they need them. Taking action to resolve their financial problems will certainly enable them to better enjoy the holiday season” says Berthiaume.

Of respondents who pursue additional stress-coping strategies during the winter holiday season, 66.7 percent said that they coped with the winter holiday season by taking time for themselves - in essence, taking a break from their holiday break. “This is an important insight for all Canadians because it comes from respondents who have experienced winter holiday-triggered stress, anxiety or depression symptoms or who have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression,” says MD Analytics Managing Partner Howard Glase.

Other ideas for coping with holiday stress included advance planning for gift buying, re-emphasizing the spiritual aspects of the holidays, moderating food and alcohol consumption and restricting the number of social events during the holidays.

“The Canadian Mental Health Association has developed a list of ten tips for maintaining strong mental fitness throughout the winter holiday season,” says CHMA-NAT CEO Glenn Thompson. “They are really common sense strategies, but during such a hectic time of year, the first thing people tend to do is take care of others before looking after themselves.”

You need to look at ways to reduce holiday stress if you are:

- irritable
- losing sleep
- losing or gaining weight (this can be hard to tell around the holidays – it could just be all the good food)
- feeling tense – with muscle aches or headaches
- feeling overwhelmed

CMHA ISSUES TIPS FOR STAYING “MENTALLY HEALTHY” DURING BUSY HOLIDAY SEASON

Here are ten tips from CMHA to help you maintain good mental health during the holiday season:

- 1. Set your priorities.** Before too many activities overwhelm you, it's important to decide which traditions offer the most positive impact, and eliminate unnecessary activities. For example, if you usually become overwhelmed by a flurry of baking, shopping, sending cards, visiting relatives and other activities that leave you exhausted, you may want to pick your favourite activities and really enjoy them, and skip the rest.
- 2. Ask for help.** Have a “family meeting” and make a commitment to share tasks. Rather than have one person cooking the whole meal, have family and friends bring a dish. Children can help with gift-wrapping, decorating, baking or addressing cards. Try to focus on doing what's really important to you and your family.
- 3. Beware of overindulgence.** Alcohol is a depressant so try to keep consumption to a minimum. Too much food can make you feel lethargic, tired and even less able to keep up a busy pace.
- 4. Relax...Breathe...Enjoy!** This sounds so simple, but sometimes we forget to take deep breaths and give our bodies the oxygen we need. Remember to take time to do things you enjoy like exercising, listening to music or meditation that will serve as much-needed breaks during the hectic weeks of the holidays.
- 5. Stay within budget.** Finances are a great stressor so set a budget and stick with it. A call, a visit or a note to tell someone how important he or she is to you can be as touching and often more meaningful than a gift.
- 6. Remember what the holiday season means to you.** While holiday advertising creates a picture that the holidays are about shiny new toys and gift giving, remember that this season is really about sharing and time spent with loved ones. Develop your own meaningful family traditions. Encourage children to make gifts or cards for friends and relatives so the focus is on giving rather than receiving.
- 7. Learn about others.** Attend diverse cultural events with family and friends. Help out at a local food bank or donate clothing and toys to families in need so that they can enjoy a happy holiday season. It's a good feeling to give to others.

8. Include others. If you have few family members or close friends nearby, reach out to neighbours. Find ways to spend the holidays with other people. If you're part of a family gathering, invite someone you know is alone to your gathering.

9. Put fun, humour, affection and “break time” into your holidays. Fun or silly activities, games or movies that make you laugh, hugs, playing with pets, and quiet time alone or with a partner are all good ways to reduce stress.

10. Get into the light. Research suggests that elevated depression around this time of year can have a lot to do with the weather, especially lack of daylight and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). So soak up the sun when you can. If your dampened mood persists for weeks into the New Year, consider a visit to your physician or mental health professional.

Study highlights and these top 10 prevention tips can be found by visiting the CMHA web site at www.cmha.ca.

About the CMHA Holiday Mental Fitness Study

The purpose of the CMHA study is to reveal insights and to measure the incidence, prevalence and severity of seasonally triggered stress, anxiety and depression symptoms. Information was sourced from two participant groups with separate unique surveys:

Canadian Consumers: Insights were sourced from participants through an online survey. A convenience sample of 401 respondents who have experienced winter holiday season stress, anxiety or depression symptoms or have an actual diagnosis of anxiety or depression.

General and Family Medicine Practitioners: Insights were sourced from an online survey of practitioners. Participation is nationally distributed; margin of error is +/-5.7%, 19 times out of 20.

For more information about the study visit:

www.mdanalytics.ca/business/CMHA_Mental_Fitness.html

Canadian Mental Health Association

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a leading national, voluntary organization within the mental health sector. For more than 85 years, it has existed to promote the mental health of all people in Canada, and to serve mental health consumers, their families and friends through education, public awareness, research, advocacy and direct services. In addition to its national office, the CMHA has provincial, territorial and regional offices in more than 135 communities across Canada. All mental health projects are based on principles of empowerment, peer and family support, participation in decision-making, citizenship, and inclusion in community life.

For more information on the Canadian Mental Health Association visit: www.cmha.ca.

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About Desjardins Financial Security

Desjardins Financial Security is a subsidiary of Desjardins Group, the largest integrated cooperative financial group in Canada, and specializes in individual and group life and health insurance, as well as retirement savings products and services. Every day over 5 million Canadians rely on Desjardins Financial Security to ensure their financial security. The Company employs more than 3,650 people and administers \$23.0 billion in assets. Desjardins Financial Security has offices in several cities across the country including Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City, Levis, Halifax and St-John's.

For more information on Desjardins Financial Security, visit:
www.desjardinsfinancialsecurity.com.

MD Analytics

MD Analytics is Canada's most innovative full-service healthcare marketing research organization. Its purpose is to provide actionable insights to enrich decision making within organizations that touch healthcare. MD Analytics embraces technology, unique methodologies and the development of innovative services to help study sponsors fulfill their information needs and to optimize the experience of survey participants. MD Analytics is a Gold Seal Member of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association and is fully compliant with industry standards and privacy codes.

For more information on MD Analytics visit: www.mdanalytics.ca.

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