



Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada  
Association Canadienne des Troubles Anxieux

# ADAC / ACTA NEWS

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Our Website:

[www.anxietycanada.ca](http://www.anxietycanada.ca)

## Provincial Associations

British Columbia: [www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com)

Manitoba: [www.adam.mb.ca](http://www.adam.mb.ca)

Ontario:  
[www.anxietydisordersontario.ca](http://www.anxietydisordersontario.ca)

Quebec: [www.ataq.org](http://www.ataq.org)

## Contact Us

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Canada

ADAC/ACTA wishes all of our members a wonderful, joy filled holiday season.

## From the President

How the Holiday Season Can Make Us Feel More Anxious  
Lynn D. Miller, Ph. D., R. Psych.

People wonder what the difference is between stress and anxiety, especially when thinking about the demands of the holiday season. There are many similarities: most people experience stress and most people get anxious from time to time. However, additional stressors for people with an anxiety disorder can make the anxiety-disordered behavior worse.

### How does stress impact us?

Stress can be triggered by one self - usually due to too many demands (the usual demands of work, children, and relationships) in addition to the demands of the season (more evenings out, expectations of social engagement and appropriate behaviors, expectations and standards for appropriate gift-giving, etc). Stress can also come from family and from one's community. There is the very real stressor of seasonal social events that many people find uncomfortable. There can be expectations of family. We often are reminded of this when we fail to meet this expectation "Oh! I thought you knew you were selecting the gift!" or "I was really looking forward to being able to spend a few minutes talking in private to you at the party." Many of us can remember being criticized about a past performance, and this generates a feeling of having to perform so much better in the future that we can become nearly incapacitated with trying to out-do ourselves. This causes stress!

When we are stressed, we are distracted and may have a tendency to over evaluate stimuli from our environment ("Oh! I was such a jerk at that party!" or "I can't believe he looked at me so harshly!") Most of the stressors are very real and make competing demands for our time, our energy, and other resources (e.g., money). These additional demands, despite the festive atmosphere, can be a significant source of worry and concern for many of us.

## Who we are:

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# Happy Holidays

### What can help?

People need to reflect on what is important for themselves and for their loved ones – and sit down with those people and decide what they would really like to accomplish during this time. Make plans! Lots of people make lists and keep to them. Write down all of your dreams of the season (projects, social functions, holiday gifts, etc.) on a list and prioritize. Put limits on each thing on your list – whether it is time limits, spending limits, imbibing limits, etc. This can act as a guide for behavior. Open discussions can help people uncover unrealistic ideas and allows everyone a chance to influence the family's behavior. Perhaps the family decides the most important thing is having a traditional meal together, or doing something the family hasn't done in a long time.

Stress can sneak up on us in ways we may not consider. When we are stressed, we are more susceptible to colds, flu, and other infection. Stress also takes its toll in other somatic ways – headaches, back pain, and stomach distress. Ways to combat stress overload is to practice good sleep hygiene (e. g., go to bed at a consistent time, get plenty of rest, etc.), watch food intake (avoid high fat foods, as these are harder to digest but are prevalent at many holiday gatherings), remember to exercise (or start that program you have been procrastinating about), be careful about alcohol intake, and schedule relaxation time.

### Children and stress

And what about children? Do kids respond to stress and anxiety during the holidays? Kids thrive on consistency and scheduling. The holiday season often throws off both. Talk to children about schedules when there is no school. What is planned and when? Write this down on a calendar where the family can see (post on refrigerator). Kids also want attention from caregivers. This can be hard to do in a frenetic holiday schedule, but is important to deliver. Ask the children what they would like to do, eat, participate in, or watch on TV. When they feel that they are in control of some events, this allows for increased feelings of competence and inclusion.

### Family losses

The holidays can magnify the loss of someone special. Many people, in their grief, make an effort to avoid or ignore this loss, which can be doubly painful. Include the person who is missing in some way – big or small. Perhaps remember a story about that person, or decide what that person would have enjoyed at this time. A small toast to the memory of that person includes them in a positive way, and allows others opportunity to voice their thoughts, too. Getting teary at this time is not only appropriate, it is healthy!

Many people find it difficult to be assertive – but this is what is

## News from the Mental Health Commission of Canada:

The Mental Health Commission of Canada has introduced a new program entitled: Mental Health First Aid.

According to their website,

"Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis.

Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved.

The earlier a problem is detected and treated, the better the outcome. Mental Health First Aid Canada gives people the skills to provide that early help that is so important in recovery."

For more information on the program please see the following link:

<http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca/Pages/default.aspx>

called for when telling others what you have decided. You can freely admit feelings of loss and disappointment ("I wanted to be there with you and Dad" or "I know it will be different and very lonely without family this year") while maintaining a firm stand. Often we feel defensive, but remember that assertive behavior actually is all about being fair to everyone and can help put guilt feelings into perspective ("This is what is in my own family's best interest as well.")

### **Beat the Holiday Blues**

Holiday blues may occur at any holiday or vacation time, and may have similar symptoms to depression (sleep disturbance, weight disturbance, loss of interest in previously enjoyed things, flat affect). A common observation is that everyone else is enjoying himself or herself in a wonderful holiday season except the blue person. Of course this is an exaggeration, and again is reflective of inaccurate evaluation of our environment. How to battle the blues? Realize that they are normal, realize that they may be a response to an incorrect evaluation of friends and family, and do something kind for you. This can be reading a favorite book, phoning a long-lost friend, writing a letter to the person you are missing, calling a counselor, or attending religious services (even if you may not otherwise regularly attend).

People often forget to take time for themselves during this busy time. To be guaranteed time for yourself, or a time committed to relaxing, you must put this on your list and schedule it in! However, without this conscious attention to one's personal life, it is often the first thing to go at this busy time of year. Indulge, knowing that if you are rested and refreshed, it is easier to participate and be generous of spirit with others.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful holiday season.

Lynn D. Miller, Ph.D, President, ADAC/ACTA

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## From the Executive Director

I am blessed to have some wonderful memories of Christmases past. Those of my childhood, spent with my cousins playing hide and seek in my paternal grand-parents' house, high on 7-Up and too much chocolate. Christmases at my maternal grand-parents farm with the smells of traditional Hungarian fare and the best cookies in the world. My grand-mother Lili was known for her vanilla crescent cookies. My friends still talk about finding a tin of them hidden in my parents dining room and sneaking upstairs to my room and eating them ALL!

Becoming a mother gave Christmas a whole new meaning. There is a lot of responsibility in carrying on the tradition of lying to kids about Santa. Finding appropriate answers to their questions about why Santa doesn't bring gifts to their Jewish friends or why

## About the ADAC/ACTA Consumer Advisory Committee

The Consumer Advisory Committee is an active body which serves as a voice for Canadians living with Anxiety Disorders.

All members of this committee have been in some way touched by an anxiety disorder and know its experience well.

This dedicated group of people advises the National Board of Directors on the issues related to the experience of living with Anxiety Disorders and provide input in areas such as topics for ADAC/ ACTA public presentations, consumer activities, advertising for public events and the ADAC/ ACTA website.

Individuals living with anxiety disorders or consumer family members are invited to apply for a position on this National body.

Currently we have representatives in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. Our goal is to have each province of this country represented on our committee and we are actively seeking candidates.

If you or someone you know would be interested in applying for a position on the ADAC/ACTA Consumer Advisory Committee, please forward a resume and any enquiries to:

ADAC/ ACTA, P.O. Box 117 ,  
Station Cote St-Luc  
Montreal , Quebec , H4V 2Y3  
or email us at  
[lpalmer@anxietycanada.ca](mailto:lpalmer@anxietycanada.ca).

we buy gifts to drop off at the food shelter for the less fortunate. About thirteen years ago, as I drove my minivan, I looked into the rear view mirror and saw an angelic face looking at me for an answer to that last question. I kind of told the truth and lied at the same time. I asked him to imagine how much it would cost to buy or make all the toys for all the kids in the world, my son (who will be starting his degree in accounting at Concordia University this January) looked at me and said "Oh Mommy, it must cost billions", to which I answered "yes" and explained Santa didn't have billions, so the mommies and daddies and grand-parents who could afford it, sent money or toys to help Santa bring toys to all the kids. I guess I did an okay job of not spoiling my kids because a few years later my youngest son, who missed out on the previous conversation, got in the car after school and announced there was no Santa. I knew that at 8 years old this was to be his and my last Christmas with Santa and I desperately wanted the magic to last. So I very calmly turned my head looked him straight in the eyes and asked "Do you really think I would buy you all those gifts?" he paused but for a second and answered "No". I saw the relief come over his face as he added "there really is a Santa".

Christmas can also be a difficult time, particularly for students. I remember hating Christmas exams...well - all exams actually. I could study for hours and get to an exam and draw a complete blank. Throughout my scholastic career I did average in courses that had exams and did great in courses that had research papers...even way back before there was internet! I never knew why this happened to me and secretly believed I wasn't intelligent. Through my work at ADAC/ACTA I have been able to identify what I suffered from as Exam or test anxiety. I have friends whose kids suffers from it also, sadly some have opted out of studying all together because they've convinced themselves that they are not intelligent. These same kids also do great on research assignments.

If you or someone you know has serious problems with exam taking, please take the time to read up on explanations and tips on dealing with exam anxiety.

The following website is one of many that explain it:  
[www.athabascau.ca/counselling/exam\\_anxiety.php](http://www.athabascau.ca/counselling/exam_anxiety.php) .  
You can also download a test anxiety booklet from:  
<http://www.anxietybc.com/test-anxiety.php>

Wishing you all the best for a happy, safe and peaceful holiday season.

Geneviève Charette, Executive Director, ADAC/ ACTA

As always, your success stories are welcome. Our next issue will be on General Anxiety Disorder. If you or someone you know has a story to share, please email it to : [contactus@anxietycanada.ca](mailto:contactus@anxietycanada.ca) and write "Success story" in the subject.

To **DONATE to ADAC/ACTA**, please go to our website [www.anxietycanada.ca](http://www.anxietycanada.ca) and either make a donation online via the secure site CanadaHelps.org or download a donation sheet and mail us a cheque. Please do not send cash by mail. We will gladly issue a tax receipt for all donations of \$20 or more.

If you have been forwarded a copy of this email and would like to receive it directly to your email address, please send an email to [contactus@anxietycanada.ca](mailto:contactus@anxietycanada.ca) and simply write "subscribe" in the subject.

Do be taken off our emailing list, please send an email and write "unsubscribe" in the subject.

Every province has an emergency line to call in time of crisis. Although the people answering may not be mental health specialists, they are usually able to direct you to another more resource.

**Alberta**: HEALTHLink Alberta 1-866-408-5465 - Health advice 24 hours a day

**B.C.**: Distress Line Network at 310-6789 if you wish to speak to a trained volunteer specialist for support or referrals related to mental health (do not enter 604, 250 or 778 area codes). This is a free call. This service is available 24 hours a day, with no wait or busy signal

**Manitoba**: Mobile Crisis Unit : 204-940-1781 or 1-888-322-3019 24hours

**New Brunswick**: The Chimo Crisis Line (24h) 1-800-667-5005

**Newfoundland & Labrador**: HealthLine will connect you with an experienced, registered nurse. It's available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. 1-888-709-2929

**Northwest Territories**: NWT Help-Line 1-800- 661-0844 The line is staffed between the hours of 7 pm and 11 pm every night of the year.

**Nova Scotia**: HealthLink 811 Just three numbers - 8-1-1, and you will have access to non-emergency health information and services.

**Ontario**: Mental Health Service Information 1-866-531-2600, 24/7

**P.E.I.** : General Inquiry Health Line: 1-902-368-6130

**Québec**: Revivre: Information and Reference Hot Line :Montreal: (514) 738-4873 Toll free throughout Canada: 1-866- 738-4873

**Saskatchewan**: Qualified registered nurses offer free health advice 24 hours a day on HealthLine, at 1-877-800-0002.

**Yukon**: Tele-Care Health Line: 1-888-255-1010