

# HOW TO COPE (WHEN IT'S NOT THE

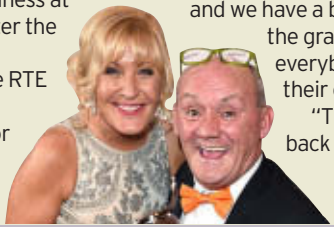
# MOST JOYFUL TIME OF YOUR YEAR)

BY **KATIE GALLAGHER** Showbiz Editor  
**BRENDAN** O'Carroll and wife Jenny Gibney have lifted the lid on their "magical" Christmas Day traditions with their Mrs Brown's Boys family. The pair also opened up on coping with grief and loneliness at this time of year after the loss of loved ones. The stars told the RTE Guide: "We have everyone around for breakfast, with matching pyjamas

## Comic couple on plans for season

and we have a big fry-up and we see the grandkids and then everybody goes and does their own thing for the day. "Then they all come back and we have a **TRADITIONS** Jenny & Brendan

pyjama party on Christmas night. All the family, any cast and crew that are about. "They all get in their pyjamas and they come and watch Mrs Brown's Boys in our house with a few drinks." Show creator Brendan said they are mindful to acknowledge how this time of year can be tough for some at home too. He added: "There's not a Christmas that goes by where we don't raise a glass to those who aren't here and it's a horribly melancholy moment."



**BRIGHT SPARK**  
 Dun Laoghaire lights enjoyed by Clodagh Metcalfe



**SIGHT FOR SORE PIES**  
 Santa at Free Now Christmas Cabbie Cafe

# Stressmas holidays

» Therapist's tips on surviving festive period

» Expert says it's time to slow down and relax



**ESCAPE** Hugh Grant



**NOT A FAN** Lady Gaga



**'SCROOGE'** Colin Firth

**TANGLED UP** Stress over Xmas lights

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BY **MICHAELA BRADY**

**CHRISTMAS is a season of joy, peace, magic, mistletoes, and miracles for most of us. Yet others are sad, stressed, lonely and depressed.**

While some wish it could be Christmas every day, others would prefer it just to go away.

It's not surprising as the reality is often in stark contrast to the festive cliches of family fun, perfect presents and happy endings.

Even the actors who featured in some of our favourite festive flicks like Love Actually aren't fans.

Hugh Grant said he "hates it and frequently visits countries who don't celebrate".

Colin Firth admitted: "Those novelty jingles make me homicidal and plunge me into the heart of Scrooge territory."

Meanwhile, Lady Gaga - who recorded the Christmas song Winter Wonderland with Tony Bennett - shared the sentiment when she bit the head off a toy Santa.

She said: "I hate the holidays. I'm alone and miserable."

As a psychotherapist, the lead-up to Christmas is a busy time, as for

many it triggers an emotional roller coaster of highs and lows.

Whether you embrace it or endure it, we can all agree it can be a bit of a stress fest.

It seems the true meaning of a day that marks a special birth has been betrayed by consumerism and excessive expectations.

It's shop till you drop, spend more than you have, socialise, volunteer, donate, renovate and then deck the halls with lots of holly.

Christmas expects family fun, great gifts and magnificent meals. Drink mulled wine, be diplomatic to



**IN A TIZZY**  
 Pressure of presents

tricky family members and friends, be a gourmet chef, a welcoming host and plaster on a smile while you do it all.

It's no wonder it's sometimes dubbed Stressmas.

A study by the American Psychological Association, revealed 38% said their stress increased during the festive season.

Here's how to get cope with the pressures that Christmas brings.

■ **Get help:** If you are struggling, getting support is vital to help you though. Confiding in friends or a therapist can help you to process

emotions and devise a plan to increase your wellbeing.

■ **Self care and soothe:** Have you ever noticed how many get sick around Christmas? It's cold and flu season, but it's also too much stress, excess and not enough rest. Ongoing stress lowers the immune system making us more prone to infections.

■ **Give yourself the gift of self care,** whether it's eating healthier, earlier nights, exercising, meditating, embracing nature, or a pamper package. Take time to rest, recharge and be well, otherwise you will have to make time to be sick.

■ **Slow down:** Rushing sends a message to the brain that you are under pressure which triggers your stress response. High stress plays havoc with physical and mental

health and is also linked to issues such as anxiety, depression, accidents, digestive issues, irritability, insomnia and migraines.

■ **Take a breath:** Deep breathing is clinically proven to promote relaxation.

■ **When you're getting a bit frazzled,** inhale through your nose for a count of six and exhale through your mouth for a count of six, and repeat 10 times to activate your relaxation response.

■ **Set boundaries:** This is your separateness from others, what you are and aren't responsible for. What is acceptable treatment and being able to say no. If you are not able to say no, you are not in control of your own life. Set a goal to do an assertiveness course or work with a therapist.

■ **Plan and prepare:** Take a leaf out of Santa's book and write down your 'to do list'. Procrastination leads to last-minute panic.

■ **Set realistic expectations:** If you are constantly chasing the clock you are setting unrealistic expectations. Finally, let go of perfectionism. Give up striving for festivities without flaws and you will relax a little more.

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## Michaela's advice for yuletide

HERE are some tips for reducing stress at Christmas, according to therapists:

- Don't let demands exceed your resources
- Be sure to delegate, so the work of

Christmas is shared

- Avoid drinking too much alcohol as this will only exacerbate your anxiety
- Be realistic about your budget
- Do Christmas your way - not in line

with others' expectations.

■ Michaela Brady is an Irish psychotherapist, training consultant and international speaker. She is the founding director of Aspire Counselling.