

Christmas can be hard for singles

WHILE many families celebrate Christmas together, the festive season can be a lonely time for singles.

Statistics released last week by online dating service eHarmony.com.au shows a nationwide increase in registrations in the week following Boxing Day, compared to the previous week.

The data reveals that 70pc more South Australians join the online dating site in the week after Christmas.

The site's senior director of research and development, Gian Gonzaga, attributed the phenomenon to two factors.

"The significant increase in registrations on Boxing Day and into the New Year actually makes a lot of sense," Dr Gonzaga said.

"The combination of the family-oriented spirit of Christmas and the desire we all feel to make New Year resolutions inevitably leads to people thinking about their relationships."

Dr Gonzaga said stress could also cause people to search for a relationship.

"While Christmas can be a great time of year, it can also be incredibly stressful as many singles will face endless questions from family and friends about their relationship status and often experience subtle or even overt pressures to find a partner before next Christmas comes around," he said.

"It is incredibly well documented that stressful times make people seek close relationships.

"This is particularly important for men as they are much more likely to look towards an

intimate partner for support than their social networks.

"Women on the other hand tend to focus on using their social networks more, although having a partner to share stressful times with is still incredibly important."

Dr Gonzaga said while the desire to find a relationship peaks over Christmas and New Year, it is important people remember to look for a quality relationship.

"Too often people think any relationship is better than none, particularly when they have been put under pressure from family to settle down," he said.

Frustrating time

DESPITE the festivities at this time of year, Christmas can be a sad, lonely and frustrating time for many people.

With more than 80pc of Australians suffering from depression at some stage in their lives, 'emotional fitness' commentator Gayla Maxwell says many people have huge expectations during the Christmas period, and regardless of these being fulfilled or not, can come crashing down.

"Christmas is the one time of the year when families are often forced together and are supposed to put on a happy face," she said.

"However, tempers can erupt, grievances aired, and often this time of forced celebration can accentuate a person's negative emotions.

"The pressure of having to buy presents, pay off credit card debt, play hostess, or entertain family members can put high emotional demands on many individuals and families."

Ms Maxwell said a key was to manage expectations.

"Whether you expect the worst, or you're hoping this year is the one where the family finally avoids the childish bickering, be aware that expectation is the father of all disappointment," she said.

"Make sure that your only expectation is that you will bring your best to the Christmas table and assume that others are doing their best also. Let go of the rest!

"The greatest gift you can give another is your happiness.

"Laugh at the family issues. Laugh at yourself. Laugh because you can. Laughter produces 'happy' chemicals in the brain that tell your whole body that you're doing great and all is well with the world!

"It is powerfully healing and brings out the best in anyone!"

Ms Maxwell said people should rest between social engagements.

"The emotional body is no different from the physical body, in that it is more likely to break down and burn out when it's unrested," she said.

"People can be wonderful to be around and still require you to expend your good energy. Be sure to rest.

"If you enjoy a drop, drink in moderation.

"Alcohol is a depressant and it directly contributes to the emotional rollercoaster that is wrought with high highs and low lows.

"There is enough emotion charge at this time of year without adding to the issue."