



COPING AT CHRISTMAS

Living with an eating disorder
at Christmas



The Christmas period can be particularly challenging for those affected by eating disorders. The build up to the season, changes in routine, expectations around socialising and food can contribute to stress, pressure and conflicted thoughts and feelings.

If you notice this happening, this guide may be a useful starting point to help you to think through what kind of support you might need during this time and ways of reducing anticipation and stress.





COPING AT **CHRISTMAS**

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FIND OUT MORE: WWW.BODYWHYS.IE



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REDUCING ANXIETY AND FEAR



Christmas is a time that the eating disorder thoughts and feelings may wish to punish you.

- The nature of an eating disorder is such that it wants you to feel afraid and anxious so that you stick to its rules even more.
- Try to quiet the thoughts in your head by not allowing it to take over, and think about what you need to do to help with this.



OPEN A CONVERSATION

Understandably, you may become anxious about talking to someone. It is important to try to keep the lines of communication open. Acknowledge that this time of year may heighten your stress around food and let others know this can be difficult for you.

REDUCING ANXIETY AND FEAR



Try not to let the anticipation of Christmas day change how you are currently eating.

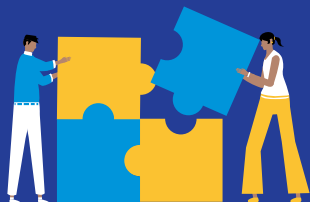


- Be aware of eating disorder thoughts using Christmas as a reason to change the way you are eating.
- Try to focus on the present and looking after yourself in the now.

Be aware of the 'all or nothing' thought patterns that can create unrealistic and rigid expectations.

It is not about eating everything or eating nothing. It is about listening to yourself, knowing that it is OK to have what you want, remembering that it is only one day and nothing awful will happen if things don't go exactly to plan.

PLANNING AHEAD



Try not to

- Expect too much – either of yourself or others, or even of the day – and you will avoid feeling disappointed.
- Let the idea of Christmas dictate the days and weeks running up to it
- Anticipate too much what Christmas day will be like.

Try to

- Plan ahead - to prevent anxiety and stress on the day
- Identify what might make things less stressful - perhaps, write out a list and share it with family
- Reflect on coping strategies for previous events with an emphasis on food to manage negative thinking.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT



Going home for Christmas may result in feeling out of control or a feeling of being less independent.

- If you are accessing a professional support service, try to explore your concerns and coping strategies in the lead up to Christmas.
- Time alone can bring up a mixture of feelings. Be mindful of becoming isolated and try to stay in touch with someone if you can.



NAVIGATING THE UNEXPECTED

UNANTICIPATED COMMENTS

Think about how you might respond if someone comments on your food plan or habits. Try to think of a response that feels safe to say, but is not defensive.



“If I am allowed to manage some things, it will help me to feel less stressed”.



“It’s important for me to be able to manage things at my own pace”

SUPPORT SYSTEM

- Try to plan ahead with people in your household that you rely on for support.
- It can be helpful to have a support system to lean on in case you get in a panic or feel overwhelmed.

MAINTAINING STRUCTURE



**Regular eating
schedule**

1

2

**Incorporating
activities that don't
revolve around food**

3

**Taking breaks
from family time**

4

**Reflecting and
planning ahead**

STRUCTURED DAYS

If you have a daily routine, try to find a balance between sticking to this on Christmas day and also allowing for some flexibility. Ask yourself, 'what do I need to do to make my Christmas day enjoyable and not make me panic?'

AFFIRMATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS

Christmas is just one day,
food is only one part, and it
is something that you can
enjoy, but may require a
little planning. No matter
how it goes, it does end.

If you look after yourself today,
the future will look after itself.
Try not to be hard on yourself.

Even if things don't change this
year, remember that it won't
always be like this.

RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

STORIES OF HOPE

“

One of the most amazing and fundamental discoveries of my own recovery journey was realising that one single act of courage and defiance against the eating disorder would correspondingly lead to another.

”

And as I nourished and fostered that blossoming sense of hope, I also started to build some sort of strange and powerful momentum.

“

I never believed that I could get to where I am right now and that I could get rid of the self-critic that has been with me my entire life.

FREE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Bodywhys offers a range of leaflets and resources including, but not limited to, the following:

- Eating Disorders - [Speaking to your Doctor](#)
- Eating Disorders - [A Treatment Guide](#)
- [Binge Eating: Breaking the Cycle](#). A self-help guide towards recovery
- [Active Waiting Resources](#) - For those who have started the referral process.

Our Media Panel kindly shared their personal experiences of Christmas on our podcast. Listen to their stories [here](#).



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