



Coping with Christmas Guide

Ways to prepare, manage change,
and look after yourself or a loved
one during the weeks around
Christmas.





About this Guide

The weeks around Christmas can bring a mix of feelings for many people affected by eating distress (or supporting someone who is). You might find routines changing, expectations shifting, and thoughts or feelings becoming stronger.

At EDNE, we understand that this time of year doesn't always feel comforting. That's why we've created this guide.

It explores ways to prepare, manage change, and look after yourself or a loved one.



First of all make sure you are comfy.

There is a lot of information in the pack so you can read it in your own time and at your own pace; take breaks.

Personalise the process and use the interactive sections to get the most out of the pack.

Inside the pack we focus on:

- Recognising pressure and stress
- Ways to prepare
- Strategies to put in place
- How family and friends can help
- Afterwards

Recognising Pressures and Stressors

Recognising what we're feeling is the first step to dealing with it. It is normal to experience any of the following...



- The Christmas period can feel chaotic. An emphasis on family get togethers and food can be particularly stressful.
- Feeling stressed from the hyperfocus on food, and the pressure to eat foods you would otherwise usually avoid (and possibly with people you would usually avoid).
- Feeling pressure to be part of a 'happy', 'jolly' or 'merry', environment which is driven by the media and social media.
- Wanting everything to go perfectly and that your Eating Distress does not impact on others.
- Worries about how you will cope in certain situations.
- The influx of seeing family and friends can raise anxieties and stress as can the idea of comments around appearance and asking how you are doing.

This list is not exhaustive, write down below what part of Christmas you are concerned about the most.



First thing: Plan ahead

It is OK to state your needs and ensure they are met.

- Talk through your concerns with the people you are spending Christmas with. Think of other people whom you'd feel supported by during family gatherings and make them aware of being needed more during this time.
- Create a plan and include what helps you feel secure ie, books, films, music, smells, family members, family pets, seeing friends or visiting local areas.
- Create a **safe space** where you can take a time out from it all, if it becomes overwhelming.
- Find out plans and work out a routine which you can implement each day. For example, getting up at the same time, going for a walk, reading before bed around the same time, calling a friend, or watching an episode of something in the evening.
- Try not to ponder on any previous negative Christmas experiences and predict it will be the same. Similarly, avoid perfectionism i.e. wanting everything to go how you plan it in your head.
- Thoughts like these can create unnecessary anxiety which is extremely uncomfortable in the present. Don't put yourself through something unnecessarily.
- Share what you are, and are not, comfortable with. For example, offer to help with food preparation if doing so helps provide you with some reassurance.
- Add your own on the next page.

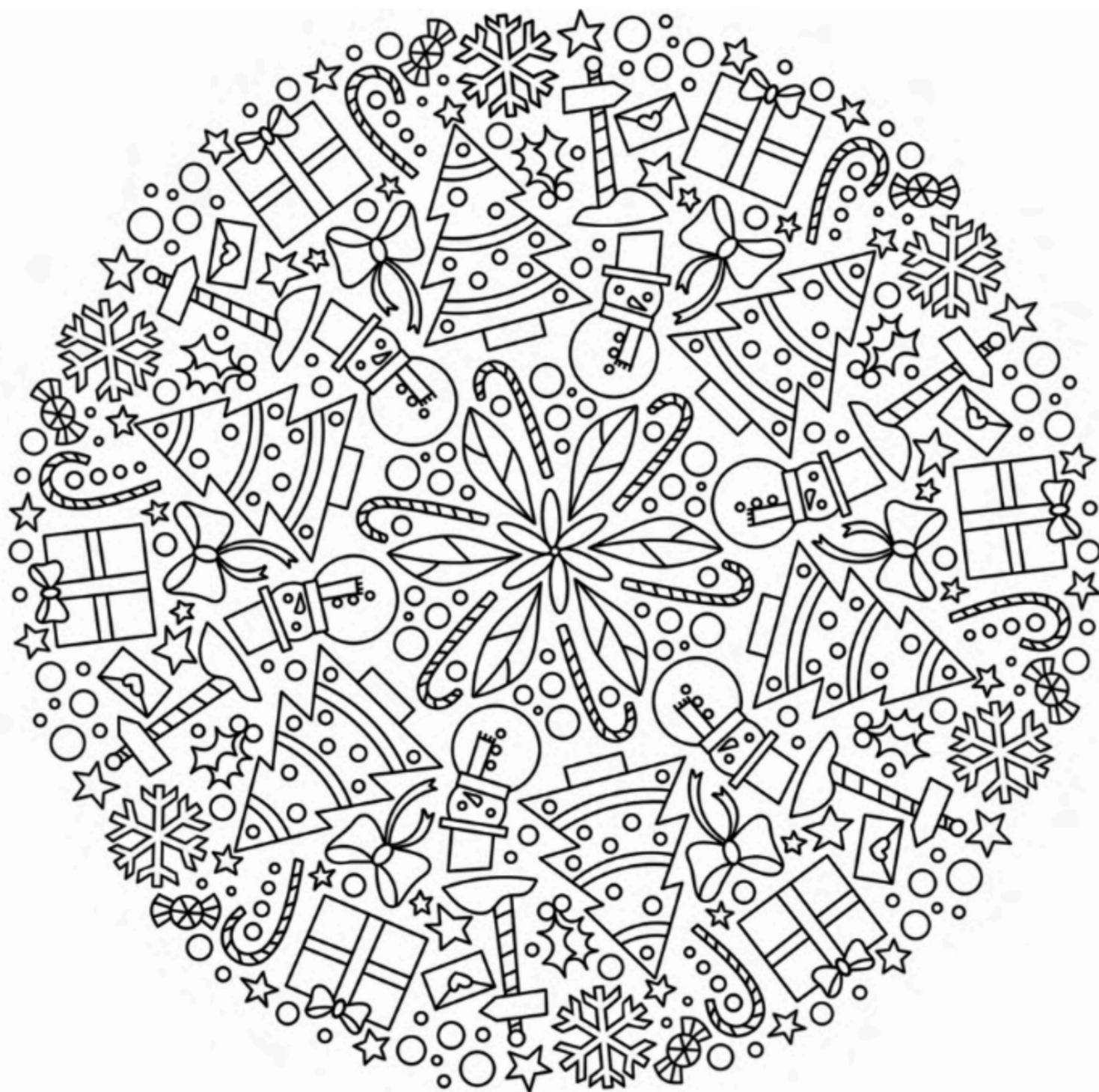
Prepare your own plan

Take time to sit with someone you feel safe with and discuss your anxieties and triggers that may appear well ahead of time before Christmas days.

Work together to make a plan that would help navigate the social occasions and meal times and what to do when things get overwhelming.



**Take 5 minutes, put the kettle
on and colour in**



Strategies to use during the Festive period

- Focus on your own traditions e.g., decorating the tree, family walks, carol singing, wrapping presents or watching Christmas films.
- The urge to binge, or to get rid of food eaten, is most likely to come in the hour or so after eating so, it's best to be with others during this time. Focus on the traditions above or other distractions to get you through this time.
- Question adverts which project the “perfect Christmas”. Advertisements idealise Christmas and are marketing tools trying to sell something.
- Similarly, be aware that people like to project their “perfect Christmas” via social media, when reality often tells another story.
- Keeping a stress ball, or a fidget toy on you can help channel nervous energy.
- Breathing techniques to facilitate calm. 3 seconds in... pause...5 seconds out...pause. Keep this going for at least 5 minutes.
- Write down feelings. Articulating how we feel, can enable perspective and context.
- Remember that you can step OUT of Christmas, if you want to. Getting out of the house, going for a walk, non-Christmas TV or music.
- Prioritise self-care, rest, hydration, fresh air and sleep.



Strategies to use continued

- Try not to isolate yourself. Human (or animal) interaction is key to remaining present. Also, sit next to someone supportive.
- Remind yourself that the Christmas period will end and is only short-lived.



Mealtime strategies

- Have a practice Christmas meal beforehand to figure out portions size, so you don't have to figure it out in the moment.
- It might be easier to have the meals served away from the table.
- With buffet style meals, it might be helpful to copy the plate of a safe person to avoid the stress of portion size.
- If you know in advance how you're going to handle the way that the meal is laid out, you're more likely to keep calm and composed throughout, leaving you with enough mental space to connect with friends and family.

Add your own below.



Helpful tips for family and friends

- As a result of the focus on food, eating in social situations and seeing friends and family, Christmas has the potential to be a highly stressful time for your family member experiencing eating distress.
- Christmas may not be the same this year; however, your loved one can still engage in traditions, which means it is just as enjoyable.
- Try to limit comments towards your family members' eating habits, food choices, appearance or portion sizes.
- You do not need to plan or create a 'perfect Christmas'.
- Encouraging your family member to eat more, or eat foods they are anxious about, is likely to have an adverse effect.
- For your family member, eating in front of a lot or unfamiliar people can be a highly stressful situation.
- Providing the family member with as much control as possible can be beneficial for them to feel at ease.
- Designate time to understand what family member is experiencing. This can be very helpful in settling anxieties around the festive period
- Create a codeword your family member can use to have a time-out or so they can talk with you in a busy setting.



Things to look forward to

It is important to remember that life goes on after Christmas. By planning for the new year, we can shift our focus toward the things we want to do over the next 12 months.



Things I want to achieve.

Things I am looking forward to.

Places I want to visit.

People (or animals) I want to spend more time with.

Things I want to work on and improve.