

CHRISTMAS ISN'T ABOUT FOOD

Try not to let it become the focus of your holiday- think about other positives and try to focus other activities which don't involve food.

If you feel anxious or concerned about food meal times can be tough- try not to let them become the negative focus of your day. Sometimes it can be helpful to distract yourself before, after or even during a meal to keep yourself from negative thoughts- maybe take a walk after a meal with a family member or friend to keep your mind of food, particularly if you might be feeling guilty or panicked. Playing a board game, wrapping some presents or calling a friend or relative are all positive alternatives. It can be also helpful to have music or the radio on in the background at meals as a distraction, or to try and focus on light conversation.

It's easy to become completely enveloped by home life during Christmas, which can become claustrophobic, stressful or make Christmas-related stress seem greater than it would otherwise. Make sure you maintain contact with the outside world and don't get too drawn into a vortex! Make time to email or call your friends, spend some time on facebook, or, if you can, make a trip to visit a friend, go shopping or do something outside of the family environment.

NEGOTIATING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Christmas is sometimes the only time of year when you get an opportunity to see your family, spend time together or catch up with friends. However, if you are coping with an ED this can become a source of stress; it may be that you fear arguments over how much or what you are eating, comments from relatives on your diet or appearance, or the stressful family environment may itself be a trigger to your ED.

It can be particularly hard if you are going home from university; it might be the first time you have seen your family since being diagnosed, you may find the loss of independence and control difficult, or you may be worried about comments on your changed appearance.

Being aware of these possible problems and thinking how you might counter them is half the battle. The other half is getting support and understanding from your family and friends so they can support you. If you can, try and tell at least one, if not all the members of your close family and friends about your ED and how you feel, so you can discuss how to make Christmas easier and avoid rising tensions (see planning ahead). This may of course be hard- you might feel unable to verbalize the many feelings you are going through, or fear that your family will become angry or upset.

Helping them understand what it is to have an ED and how they can best support is thus very important- if you feel unable to talk about your fears and solutions, would it be easier to write it down and show it to them, or to ask a trusted friend, sibling or relative to explain it to others if you find it hard yourself? Don't feel you have to tell everyone unless you want to, but having at least one supportive member can help support you and protect you from unhelpful situations. It's important that your family understand small achievements and that you may struggle at time, for example at meals, which may make you behave abnormally or be particularly quiet for example.

If your family are struggling to understand or work out their own role in supporting you there are a number of resources available to help - remember that they too may be feeling scared, anxious and worried, and may be confused about how best to help. It might be helpful for them to read some advice leaflets on caring or to ring b-eat or other helplines.

If you feel unable to confide in your family or friends, or feel that they have not understood the situation remember that you don't have to suffer alone. There is non-judgmental, completely confidential support available. The b-eat help line or online chat, Samaritans, or childline are all there to listen and support, not judge, force you to do things or criticize. It might be that you feel comfortable seeking help from your GP, or maybe asking to see the practice nurse to talk about your problems- remember that your doctor and other health professionals are there to provide emotional support as well as health care.

Eating Disorders

Christmas Survival Guide

Coping with Christmas for sufferers

GETTING SUPPORT

B-EAT

b-eat deals specifically with eating disorders and aims to support both carers and sufferers. It runs a completely confidential helpline and email service all year round and over Christmas:

08456 341414

help@b-eat.co.uk

Monday to Friday 10:30am - 8:30pm

Saturdays 1:00pm - 4:30pm

Sunday ~ Closed

Bank Holidays 11:30am - 2:30pm

Christmas Eve 10:30am-14:30pm

Christmas Day 10am-12 noon

Boxing Day 13:00pm-16:30pm

Monday 28th December 11:30-14:30pm

New Year's Eve 10:30am-14:30pm

New Years Day 11:30 am- 14:30pm

www.b-eat.co.uk/HelpandSupport

B-eat Youthline

08456 347650

TXT: 07786 20 18 20

fyp@b-eat.co.uk

Online 1-2-1

Monday to Friday 4:30pm - 8:30pm

Saturdays 1:00pm - 4:30pm Sunday ~

Closed

Bank Holidays 11:30am - 2:30pm

OTHER HELPLINES

The Samaritans 08457 90 90 90

Rethink 01823 354879

Saneline 0845 7678000

NHS direct 08454647

Mind 0845 660163

CUSU WEBSITE information and leaflets for sufferers and carers
www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/welfare/eatingdisorders

KCL SITE - very useful particularly for carers
<http://www.iop.kcl.ac.uk/sites/edu/?id=9>

National Centre for Eating Disorders

www.eating-disorders.org.uk/

Something Fishy

www.something-fishy.org

RCSP

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation/mentalhealthproblems/eatingdisorders.aspx>

Christmas, with its undeniable focus on food and disruption of everyday routine, can be a particularly stressful time of year if you are suffering with an eating disorder, in addition to the distress that might be prompted by returning home after term and having to face new challenges, routines and lifestyle. This leaflet is designed to support you at this potentially difficult time- remember Christmas is supposed to be a time of family love and enjoyment, not a time of stress.

Christmas isn't about food. DON'T LET THE ED WIN!

- SHARE YOUR CONCERNS AND LET YOUR FAMILY/FRIENDS SUPPORT- EXPLAIN WHAT MIGHT BE HARD AND DISCUSS WAYS TO HELP
- PLAN AHEAD TO COMBAT NEGATIVE THINKING AND OBSTACLES
- PLAN AHEAD TO AVOID FOOD STRESS
- DON'T SUFFER ALONE

REMEMBER:

- Plan and discuss your meals in advance
- Stick to a manageable routine
- Don't be afraid to experiment, e.g. swap mealtimes around
- If you feel pressurised, don't be afraid to say NO
- Two days of Christmas are not worth sabotaging your meal plan for
- Christmas can be stressful, don't get manic, ask others for help
- If you choose to drink alcohol, don't substitute this for food
- Don't isolate, share your thoughts and feelings
- Don't starve yourself in anticipation of eating more later on- this may lead to stress or bingeing later
- Remember Christmas doesn't go on forever- it will surely go faster than you think.
- Keep it simple, stay focused on recovery, and enjoy!

Often ED stress might be triggered by a feeling of loss of control and fear of unknown situations around food, problems that might be particularly great at Christmas, with its many food-oriented social events, festive snacks and unusual meal plans and times. Unusual scenarios and 'public' eating can be hard, as can the 'excess' of food available, fear foods and focus on plenty. It is worth taking time to think about situations which may arise and planning how you can deal with them so that your ED doesn't prevent your enjoyment or participation in Christmas activities.

However "Attempting to set rigid guidelines on what you will eat, where you'll eat, or where you'll be served food, is not a good idea" says Mary George of B-eat "On the day, events or your feelings might not turn out as you expected. You'll feel under even more pressure if you have agreed, for example, to eat a certain amount."

Planning ahead to avoid stress

PARTIES AND SOCIAL EVENTS

Christmas parties and events are often centered around food, which can cause anxiety and worry. Don't let your ED get the better of you by avoiding social events in order to avoid food; try to think in advance about what food will be available, and incorporate this into your meal plan, maybe bringing your own party offering of a food to share which you also feel comfortable eating. Or, if you are going to a later party, don't worry about eating your meal in advance so that you can enjoy yourself without worrying about food.

MEALS AT HOME AND FAMILY

If you are eating special meals with your family for most of Christmas, it is worthwhile talking to the 'chef' about what will be eaten and how this can be adapted so you can feel comfortable and enjoy spending time together.

Christmas food does not have to be scary! Discuss fears and sources of stress in advance and think about how you can adapt meal plans and the environment to make it easier for you; if both you and your family are willing to be flexible then eating needn't become a source of stress and festive foods can be included in your existing eating plan.

For example, could the meal be adapted to avoid excessive 'fear foods' such as chocolate? Would be easier if you could choose to have boiled instead of roast potatoes? Could a fruit pudding be served to everyone rather than a creamy one, so you can be included in the festivities but not have to worry about food, being different to everyone else or provoking comment.

Try not to worry about food throughout the holiday, eat what you can and remember it's okay to have treats and snacks. Don't not eat because you are worried about bingeing, it's more likely to happen if you don't eat regularly. Try to enjoy the opportunity to incorporate foods you haven't had for a while, but equally don't feel pressurized by others if you don't feel ready.

If you are concerned about bingeing due to the large amounts of 'special' foods and the focus on eating in the house try discussing it with your family. Maybe it would be easier if you don't overstock but only buy what's necessary to reduce temptation, or if opened boxes of sweets or snacks were put away after meals. It might be helpful to discuss (although not necessarily 'set') portion sizes in advance if you are worried about bingeing. Equally, if you are worried about being forced to eat more than you are comfortable with maybe agree portion sizes, or that you can serve yourself or not finish all your food if you are struggling

UNHELPFUL THINKING

Christmas can be a time of stress generally, in addition to stress triggered by food, and this can accentuate negative thinking which triggers ED distress. Try to think in advance about what these triggers and sources of stress might be, what responses they might provoke, and how you might deal with them. Try to be reflective and recognize when your ED has been triggered, why, and what type of negative thinking pattern it has caused- you can then try to counter this cycle and regain control, rather than letting the ED control you. Trying the 7 step problem solving method can be helpful (right), as can keeping a mood diary, making a table of fears, solutions and thoughts (for example see right) which can you fill in advance and throughout the holidays, or just trying to mentally stay reflective.

Worry/fear	Solution	Thoughts/feelings
Comments from family about your diet or appearance- either that you look well or that you don't eat enough for example	If people say you look well it is a genuine comment! Try and feel happy! Discuss in advance that comments on your appearance may make you uncomfortable and ask your family to be sensitive.	
Talk of others' diets or 'fainess'	These are not aimed at you! Ask your family to be sensitive with these issues	
Eating in front of other people judged	Remember, people are unlikely to be paying as much attention as you think	
Being forced to eat lots of fear foods	Discuss and plan in advance	
Unusual eating occasions	Try to be flexible, plan in advance	
Being forced to consume more than you feel comfortable with	Discuss your fears and plan ahead	
Binge eating- volume of food available, loss of control	Consider your meal plan ahead, don't worry if it doesn't go to plan- you haven't failed!	

7 step problem solving method :

1. What is the problem?
2. Write down all the possible solutions you can think of, even those that seem unrealistic.
3. Write out the pros and cons of each solution.
4. Choose one solution that seems the most viable.
5. Decide how to put the solution into practice – write out all the steps needed to do this, however small they may be.
6. Carry out the solution step by step.
7. Re-evaluate. How did it go? What could you do differently next time?