

For many people Christmas is a time for celebration, eating, drinking and spending time with loved ones. However, for others Christmas can be difficult even at the best of times. After a year of anxiety and uncertainty and with the prospect of a different kind of Christmas due to the restrictions, there will be some of us who are not looking forward to Christmas this year. But there are steps you can take to look after yourself and your wellbeing over the festive period and below are some tips on how you can do this.

**Self-care**

* Spend some time outside each day, even if its just a short walk around the block or walking around your garden or local green space. Going outside when it’s grey and cold might seem unappealing but getting some natural light during the day can really lift your mood.
* Meditate – Some people find mindfulness meditation a helpful way to relax and stay in the moment. There are lots of apps you can use such as [Headspace](https://www.headspace.com/) and [Calm](https://www.calm.com/) both of which you can try for free.
* Give yourself permission to be you and create your own experiences and happiness.
* Make time for yourself – take a long bath, read a book or go for a run. Choose something you enjoy and allow yourself the time to do it!
* Exercise is a great stress reliever – stick to your usual exercise routine or start something new.
* Be kind to yourself – Try to go easy on yourself and show yourself the same kindness and compassion as you would to others.
* If you struggle with sleep, stick as close as possible to your usual routine.
* Reach out for help as early as possible – we all get overwhelmed by how we feel at times. If things get too much over the festive period and you feel you can’t cope ask for help from a friend or family member or an organisation like Samaritans (details at the bottom of this article).
* Alcohol in moderation – drink sensibly over the festive period. Whilst a little alcohol can make you feel relaxed, drinking too much can make you feel irritable and low.

**Feeling isolated**

Some of us may feel lonely and isolated at this time of year, the tips below may help:

* Stay connected with friends and family even if you can’t see them in person. The pandemic has shown how easy it is to keep in contact by phone or over the internet. A regular call to someone will help them as much as it helps you.
* Try and get outside, just being around other people may help with your feelings of loneliness.
* Try to open up to friends and family about how you feel.

**Finances**

Plan your finances this winter and festive season, including making sure you are getting any benefits you are entitled to and getting help with any debt concerns you might have.

* Create a realistic budget. The Money Advice Service have a Christmas Money Planner [here](https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/tools/christmas-money-planner).
* Manage your debts. The University EAP service includes debt counselling and financial and tax information.
* Share your worries – whilst this isn’t always easy, a friend or family member may be able to help you get support.

The EAP [Winter Support Pack](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/hr/docs/health-and-wellbeing/winter-support-pack-2020.pdf) provides more information on the points highlighted above, but also on managing winter blues and relationships over the festive period.

If you do find yourself struggling over the festive season you’re not alone and there are resources you can access:

* [Employee Assistance Programme](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/hr/employee-assistance-programme/eap.aspx) the University EAP provides a confidential information and counselling service, including legal and financial information and debt counselling
* [Mental Health Foundation](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health) have some great resources to help you look after your mental health.
* [Mind article on Christmas and Mental Health](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/christmas-and-mental-health/christmas-and-mental-health/)
* [Coping with Grief at Christmas](https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/about-grief/anniversaries-and-reminders-when-you-are-bereaved/coping-at-christmas) – Cruse Charity
* [Samaritans](https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/) are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year