

Christmas tips for autistic adults

Christmas can be an exciting and fun time for many of us, but new activity can be overwhelming for some. However, with good planning and communication, Christmas can be enjoyed by all. With your help, we have compiled a list of tips for the festive period.

This information has been compiled for autistic adults. The tips are intended to provide general guidance and will not be suitable for everyone. **Key to preparing for a successful Christmas is to plan and share what is important for you with those you are spending Christmas with.**

"Have a plan beforehand and share it. My partner knows how stressful not knowing what to expect makes me on a regular day, much less over the holidays."



Preparing

Many autistic people can find any kind of [change](#) difficult. Planning and preparation is key in making Christmas as enjoyable as possible.

You could:

- Where suitable, and possible, plan your Christmas in advance with your family, friends and any support services to ensure all plans are shared and you know what you will be doing, with whom and when.
- If it is helpful, use [visual aids](#) such as calendars, lists and schedules to help plan your Christmas.
- Think about ways you can enjoy the festive season that work for you.

"If you enjoy the Christmas lights and window displays, sit on the top deck of the bus and you'll get a birds' eye view without getting stuck in the crowds."

- If visiting family and friends, where suitable tell them of any adjustments they could make to help your visit be as stress free as possible, i.e. turning off Christmas lights, planning food in advance, sharing plans for activities and having a quiet space to escape to.

"We don't have a traditional Christmas meal. We each have our favourite food instead."

- Think about and plan around [sensory issues](#) that could cause you distress or discomfort, consider ear defenders etc... for times of potential sensory overload.

"It can be helpful to wear earplugs when attending family or work Christmas parties and social events. Also scoping out the nearest toilets is one of my coping tips as they always provide a safe and quiet escape if you feel sensory overload"

- Create/find a quiet space where you can take a break if you get overwhelmed, preferably in a Christmas-free area, and particularly around the main days of Christmas or at key times that there may be stress.

"I go to my parents and there's usually a big family Christmas. I make sure I take my headphones and get plenty of breaks. If I disappear people know I've gone for some time out."

- Don't just plan for Christmas day, plan for the whole festive break and give yourself quiet days to recoup if needed.
- Budget for buying Christmas gifts.

"Definitely feel that budgeting is a must around Christmas time! Trying not to over think Christmas, plus making sure you're as organised as you can be, will certainly help also."

- Plan in Christmas shopping, think about going at quieter times, or shopping online.

"Shopping gets done late in day, headphones on, or online."



Schedules

Many autistic people have a strong need for routine. If schedule and routine is important to you, you might want to:

- Keep your daily schedule the same as possible, including on Christmas Day.

- Gradually introduce Christmas activities into your daily schedule, e.g. Christmas shopping, putting up decorations or switching on the tree lights.
- Plan in any additional visits from family or friends in advance.

"I find Christmas rather overwhelming, the build-up causing much stress and all. I find it helps keeping the routine as normal/usual as possible."

"Normally it's a quiet affair. Just the immediate family and I'm warned in advance if anyone turns up during the day. Growing up Christmas was fun and an exciting time."

"Visitors work around my routine and we've had the same Christmas day routine for years."



Decorations

Many autistic people will have differing **sensory** needs, decorations for some are great whereas others may struggle.

"Christmas is and always will be overwhelming. Christmas scents and candles can be super overwhelming sensory-wise so could be avoided when decorating. Flashing fairy lights can be overwhelming visually, etc"

You could:

- Plan the most suitable decorations for you and your home, including where best to have them and how many, if any.

"I put my cards up and treasure those for the kind thoughts behind them, but otherwise have no other decorations."

- Consider decorating gradually, for example, you could put the Christmas tree in position, decorate it the next day, then put up other decorations even later.

"Slowly introducing decorations rather than just chucking them all out on display."

- Create Christmas-free areas of the home without decorations.



Presents

Presents can be overwhelming; the number of them, the wrapping and the expectation to respond after receiving them.

You could try telling family and friends what your preference is in advance, including:

- The number of presents – make a list of presents you would like to receive and share with family and friends. This also removes any element of surprise if you find that difficult.

“I make a list of things I'd like for Christmas with various budgets in mind, I don't get everything in the list, but it gives people an idea of what I like. No one must deviate from the list and get me a 'surprise' cos I really don't like surprises.”

- Whether presents should be wrapped or not.



Getting support

Liaise with family and friends to ensure smooth planning across the Christmas period and identify any help they can offer.

- Get ideas from other autistic people, and share your tips with them, in our [online community](#).

Further help from our charity

- [Preparing for change](#)
- [Routines](#)
- [Preparing for Christmas: autism resources](#)
- [Visual supports](#)
- [Communication](#)
- [Anxiety in autistic adults](#)
- [Organising, sequencing and prioritising](#)
- [Obsessions, repetitive behaviour and routines](#)

- [Preparing for change](#)
- [Managing money](#)

Useful resources

- [I know what to expect at Christmas & birthdays](#)
- [3 tips for an autism friendly Christmas](#)