

# A Survival Guide for the Holiday Period

With the end of the year fast approaching, this can be a time filled with excitement and anticipation of a well-earned break, or possible trepidation of pending Christmas family gatherings. And for our culturally diverse society, the Christmas and the Holiday period can mean different things to different people. It can be a time for spiritual reflection on the meaning of Christmas, the holiday of a lifetime, family gatherings, helping others less fortunate in our communities, or a time for personal reflection. Whatever the meaning we all place, plan to self-care and build your resilience to manage the parties, food, alcohol, family and friends, in order to thrive or just survive this festive period.

## The Myth of the Perfect Christmas

The Christmas and Holiday period is filled with expectations and a diverse range of emotions, from the excitement of family gatherings, to anxiety about managing split, blended or fractured family relationships. Often it is the expectation that it should be perfect that heightens our anxieties when things don't go to plan. Be it the coordination of family get-togethers, the travel on the day, the expense of gifts, the consumption of food and alcohol either as a celebration or to self-medicate emotions during family get-togethers, managing child care access within split/blended families, grieving over lost relationships or the death of loved ones – all can potentially affect us in lead up or on the day of Christmas.

So let's forget the perfect Christmas, and focus on what can help you get through the day:

- Take care of yourself by planning a 'circuit breaker' in advance that helps you strategically remove yourself from people or situations that zap or push your buttons
- Plan your family visits with some buffer time between visits
- Set realistic expectations around how the day needs to turn out rather than 'how it should'

- If your family members bicker then expect some tension on the day
- Avoid trigger topics such as religion, politics, family history of conflict
- Minimise alcohol consumption (moderation is the key)
- Incorporate a walk as part of your routine either in the morning or evening as a way to wind down
- Use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation to manage anxiety or tension
- Try to have a good nights sleep and if possible sneak in a 'siesta' during the day
- Meditate for 10-20 minutes as time out
- Keep moving during the day to avoid that 'sluggish' feeling
- Expect something to go wrong – you can use this as a story in next years gathering!
- If you are on your own this Christmas for the first time then it's normal to grieve in this period and remember those whom you've lost – you may want to share some of your memories with others you trust
- If you anticipate being on your own during this period and may find it difficult, plan to be involved in either voluntary work or participate in community activities in your area.

## The Myth of the Perfect Holiday

Holidays bring parties and gatherings, along with more opportunities than usual to spend time with family members. A family may naturally expect to have a good time on holidays. However, it is worth remembering that most families only spend a few hours per day together because of work, school and recreational pursuits. Habits that are usually just annoying could become major sources of irritation when you spend every waking minute together on holidays.

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# A New Perspective on Christmas

To keep the holiday dream alive without losing your mind:

- Itineraries should have some down time for each member
- Expect tensions and conflict
- Keep lines of communication open, rather than leaving this until you return from holiday
- Accept that setbacks to schedules or delays are part of going on holidays
- Remember it's a time to recharge your batteries, not an opportunity to see everything listed in the guidebook. With a narrowing work/life divide, many people over-compensate by organising jam-packed schedules, which can lead to exhaustion and disillusionment.

## Budget

The Christmas and Holiday period is perhaps the most critical for our personal budgets – despite what advertisers, retailers, and younger members of our society would have us believe.

A loving and generous personality can coexist with a careful approach to financial management. Plan and stick to your Holiday/Christmas budget, and avoid overspending, no matter how great the deal is! Remember, credit card statements tend to arrive in January – although some sneaky companies are festive enough to 'defer' your statement until February. But if there's one thing you can be sure of during this period, your credit card balance will 'be back'.

Here are some basic ideas for keeping your hard-earned at arm's length from the retail sector this Christmas:

- Set your holiday budget and stick to it – consider getting the whole family involved
- Plan for hidden costs e.g. food, overseas calls, entertainment etc.
- Buy presents only for the children

- Have a Kris-Kringle, where everyone draws a name out of a hat and buys a present only for that person
- Set a limit on the cost of presents
- Plan party meals with the excess food most of us gather at this time of year

## Food & Alcohol in Moderation

With the festive period, restraint, routine and exercise tend to go out the door or nearest window. So if you like to have a drink or two, remember to self-pace at parties and alternate water between drinks. Other tips for enjoying yourself in moderation this year:

- Nominate yourself as the designated driver ('Sober Bob') if you wish to avoid alcohol
- Try to eat a substantial meal to improve your tolerance
- Avoid eating too many salty party snack foods which can encourage you to drink more quickly
- Learn how to say no and encourage your friends to be supportive
- Designate AFDs (Alcohol Free Days) in your week

## Prepare and Survive

Surviving the Christmas and Holiday period can be a challenge. Like any good survival plan, the trick is in the preparation.

This season, we suggest you pack a healthy bag of trail mix and a torch, rather than just letting things unfold.

Wishing you a safe and realistic Christmas and Holiday period, from the team at Converge International incorporating ResolutionsRTK.

