

# Survive christmas – and the new year

Although it is a christian festival, christmas has a huge impact on all our society. There are many implications for a recovering person; even people who do not usually drink to excess find themselves going beyond their normal limits at this time of year. People in early recovery are very vulnerable. Christmas can be a painful time for recovering people who can feel alone and isolated, and aware of all they lost when using drink or drugs, particularly when family systems have yet to heal, where there is unresolved grief issues or when family members are still in active addiction. It is often hard to “fit back in” to a family system or accept that families are too unsafe to be near, or friends who might not understand changes you need to make to sustain recovery. Be safe and:

- ❄️ Avoid environments with alcohol, choose to spend time with other recovering people
- ❄️ Plan to attend specific mutual-aid meetings over the holiday period – make a written plan and stick to it, otherwise “the illusion of self-sufficiency can take hold”
- ❄️ Learn to use the telephone before you are desperate to make a life-saving call – call people for a chat or to see how they are getting on
- ❄️ If you are round alcohol, try to have at least one person around who understands your situation and is available to support you.
- ❄️ And be wary of old haunts – start a new history with others in recovery.

1. Make a relapse-prevention plan for each day of the holiday period, to include daily fellowship meetings. Check your local area as there are usually extra meetings and social gatherings scheduled to help people who are struggling.

2. Plan activities such as exercise, walking, relaxation, thus avoiding the temptation to “slob out” alone at home.
3. Plan, if possible, to be with other recovering people or people who support your recovery.
4. Have breaks from stressful situations by meeting friends for coffee, going for a walk, to the gym etc.
5. Make a list of people you can call if things get difficult – at least five names – and carry the list and your phone with you at all times.
6. Do service in the 12-step fellowships or volunteer to help other charities.
7. Do a daily gratitude list to help keep your spirits up.
8. Try to have everything you might need at home in advance to avoid wandering the streets looking for shops on the main holidays, as most of the open shops will be off-licenses. Try to include plenty of non-alcoholic drinks and healthy food which you enjoy.
9. Avoid isolation and listening to music which can trigger sadness or uncomfortable feelings
10. Avoid pubs, clubs, restaurants or other ‘wet’ places. Do not be tempted to “test yourself”.
11. Do not get into arguments, squabbles or unhealthy dynamics with friends or family members, especially if they have been drinking.
12. “Keep it in the day”. Each day of the festive season is just another 24 hours, so try not to give it any more power than that. Enjoy your christmas and New Year, one day at a time.

“Over the years, as our rehab clients have become more diverse, so our approach to christmas and new year had to adapt. It is now probable that there will be a group of clients for whom the

*Christmas and new year, plus the few weeks after them, are the riskiest times of the year for relapse back to alcohol/drugs. We asked experts for their top survival tips.*



celebration of christmas is something they have never experienced and might not want to be involved in. We must be aware that for some of our clients christmas can be a difficult time for different reasons. It is also important to allow enough time for each client to process their feelings before the festive period itself. This involves raising the issue as early as November in rehab, with each client having a personal plan for any potential problem areas well before time.”

#### “Dos”

- ❄️ Use the fellowship, meetings and your sponsor
- ❄️ Avoid “wet” places and parties
- ❄️ Take control – invite people to you
- ❄️ Be good to yourself, allow some treats
- ❄️ Keep in touch with safe friends/family/support
- ❄️ Keep balance and variety in your activities: TV, exercise, walks in the fresh air
- ❄️ Plan ahead – make a relapse-prevention plan
- ❄️ Plan fun as well as safety!

#### “Don’ts”

- ❄️ Don’t hide away and isolate
- ❄️ Don’t stagnate in front of the TV
- ❄️ Don’t project
- ❄️ Don’t become complacent or procrastinate
- ❄️ Don’t go somewhere without a “get out clause”; make it easy to leave a difficult situation.

#### “Remember”

- ❄️ To have realistic expectations of this period
  - ❄️ To have fun – recovery is to be enjoyed
  - ❄️ To have company when possible, maybe even a recovery party
  - ❄️ The spiritual base to christmas
  - ❄️ Gratitude for being clean/sober
  - ❄️ Early January can increase risk of relapse as people are often relieved at having ‘survived’.
- “In the lead up to christmas, counsellors begin to identify the personal issues their clients might experience at this time of year. Group work is then facilitated in which women are encouraged to voice their personal responses to being in treatment at christmas.”

- ❄️ Aim to be in a safe place over the festive season. The fellowships have dinners and dances to protect people and let them discover that they can enjoy themselves without drink/drugs.
- ❄️ Whatever your budget, set a bit aside for a few presents for others. The thought counts.
- ❄️ Be proactive this year: get your cards now, dust off your address book and send some cards. Let a few people know you are alive again!

The Christmas period is more than “just another day” in early recovery, and needs special planning and attention. In fact, it is one of the two key times when particular vigilance is needed. One of those times is christmastide. And the other is all the rest of the year.

Remember, too: this christmas will be a building block for new, happier memories. Create new rituals – provide a foundation for next christmas and the ones after that.