

PREPARING FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

Suddenly the restrictions have lifted and we can start to plan for the festive season! It's exciting – but can be stressful! What can be done to manage it?

What Things can Cause Stress at this Time?

- It's only four weeks until Christmas and, up to now, people may not have been making any plans. Now we know we can see our friends and family, there's a lot to be done in a short time!
- Secondly, for many people this has been a particularly hard year financially and they don't have much money but they still want to have a celebration – for their families and themselves.
- Thirdly, many people are still anxious about being together in large groups. Going to a crowded shopping centre or to a party with other people may cause significant stress.

What's the First Thing People Need to Do?

- Start by planning your gatherings. You'll be able to have a total of 30 people – including children – in your home by Christmas Day so if you want to see more than 30 people, consider a series of gatherings – maybe scattered across Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.
- Remember some people may not feel comfortable with 30 or even 20 other people so it may be a good idea to have a couple of small gatherings too.

What Next?

- Work out a budget. Once you know how many and what kind of gatherings you have to cater for, work out the budget for food and drink.
- If money is tight, you may not be able to cater as you have in past years so choose one or two things to make it "special". Maybe turkey or ham but not both. Maybe prawns but not lobster. Maybe just one special dessert instead of two or three. You could also work out a menu with others family members so all the good things are provided – just not by one person!

How Else Can We Cut Down on Food Costs?

- Having a range of home made salads or dips are not only nutritious but also cheaper than buying them ready made at the supermarket. They are easy to make and will keep you going for a couple of days so you don't have to cook again!
- Consider making things like mince pies, shortbread, gingerbread or other biscuits. Not only is it cheaper but it can be fun – and something the kids can enjoy too.

What About Gifts?

- Christmas gifts are often the most expensive part of the budget! There are things you can do that cost little – or nothing – except your time! The easiest is a "gift voucher" for you to do something for the person: their ironing, clean their house, baby sit their kids, cook a meal, weed their garden – just consider what would give them a break!
- There's nothing shabby about a homemade gift: cakes, biscuits and homemade chocolates are always popular but don't overlook giving something that someone has particularly admired: a bowl of your special potato salad, their favourite dessert or some lemon curd you've made.
- Flowers, fruit or vegetables from your garden are terrific gifts – and useful too!
- Get creative! Paint, draw, sew or make something. Create a special 2020 Christmas decoration. Talk to your family about past Christmases and write down their recollections in a little book that you give everyone. You may start a new Christmas tradition!
- Give the gift of your time – spend time face to face with the people you've missed. Meet for a coffee, go for a walk, go to the gardens or on a picnic. Talk and laugh. Create a new memory.

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