



# Christmas survival guide tips



Information Sheet No.8

Food

## Food for thought

**If you're planning on introducing new foods, don't leave it until the last minute and expect your child to try things all at once.** In the run up to Christmas, think about gradually incorporating different ingredients into their normal dinners to see how they get on. You could even put the food on a separate plate to their main meal, and give them the option of trying it if they want to. That way when it gets to Christmas Day and they're presented with a different dinner, they won't be completely confused by the new ingredients you have included.

**Consider having them help choose the menu.** If you're expecting your young person to have a traditional Christmas Dinner, why not offer to include some of their favourite foods too? Using visual tools, you could show your child what you are planning on serving and ask them if there are any additions they would like to be made to the menu. If expecting them to eat a roast dinner is going to be too difficult, how about making them a different dinner altogether? Try not to get pressurised in to serving something just because you feel you should.

**Think through the length of time you're expecting to spend at the dinner table.** Christmas dinner is traditionally all about sitting together at a table for a long, leisurely meal. This may be a huge challenge for a child who struggles to wait, sit for long, or cope with the social conversation. Perhaps think about your expectations and how you can make it easier for your child to manage.

**If a sit down meal seems too stressful, why not have a buffet?** Giving your child a choice over what food they eat could be really beneficial. By having a buffet, you are allowing them to have ownership over their Christmas Dinner. You could even incorporate some family favourites too. That way it isn't as noticeable if your child with additional needs chooses not to have the same foods as the rest of the family, which would work well if you have relatives visiting who aren't so understanding.



**Expecting your child to accept having their home environment changed over the Christmas Holidays can be a big ask, especially if they rely on routine.** While they may have been well prepared for the display of decorations around the home, they may not be expecting the dinner table to look different too. If your child is used to using certain cutlery, make sure you stick with the same on Christmas Day. Having their food presented on a different plate could be the reason they decide not to eat dinner.

**Too much sugar!** Christmas goes hand in hand with over-indulgence and eating too much of the 'naughty' foods. Too many sweet foods and drinks may have an adverse affect on your child's behaviour. Try to pace them if you can, or time their sugar rush for a time when great-auntie isn't going to witness it and give an opinion on your parenting style!





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## Spending Christmas away from the family home

If you've decided to spend the Christmas Holidays round a relatives or friends, make sure your young person is well prepared for the trip. Consider thinking about the following things:-

**Seating** – If you don't feel your child is going to be comfortable sitting at a table to eat their dinner, ask your relatives or friends if they can create a quiet space for them to sit separately. It would be good to broach this subject several weeks before the big day, so that there is plenty of time to sort the suggested adjustments.

**Cutlery** – As mentioned above, if your young person likes to eat their meals using certain cutlery, consider taking this with you. You could prepare a bag with all the essentials in to

make your child feel as comfortable as possible.

**Choice of food** – It would be good to check exactly what food is being served well in advance. If you feel the choices on offer aren't going to be to your child's taste, suggest taking something for them that can be heated up quickly in the oven. By doing so, you could avoid the awkwardness of your child saying they don't like the food that has been offered to them.

**Time** – If your young person is struggling with the thought of spending Christmas Day at a different house, let them know a time you are going to be leaving and try to stick to it. If they know exactly what time they will be going back home again, this should minimise their anxieties around the day.

