



Christmas

AND ANXIETY
WORKBOOK

Anxiety UK



Christmas & Anxiety

'Tis the season...

While the holidays can be a time of fun and relaxation, for those of us who live with anxiety, the festive season can represent extra pressure and stress. It can feel overwhelming as the to-do list grows and we juggle the additional obligations that come with this time of year.

As Christmas approaches, it's important not to forget to take care of ourselves. It's okay to feel extra anxious at this time of year. Practicing self-care and understanding will help reduce festive stress.

The Anxiety UK staff and volunteer team have come together to create this booklet to offer simple tips, distraction techniques and activities for looking after yourself this Christmas. We hope that you find it useful and that you take some comfort knowing you are not alone, as we are here for you.

Wishing you a happy, relaxing, and safe Christmas however you choose to spend it.

Happy Holidays!



Why am I anxious at Christmas?

Financial difficulties can cause a great deal of anxiety at Christmas with presents to buy, outfits to pick out, and all the festive "essentials" such as decorations, a tree, and don't forget the wrapping paper! Navigating your way through crowded shopping centres can also prove to be nightmare...

Over 2 in 5 Brits feel stressed during the festive season. And 25% feel that Christmas is more stressful than the rest of the year.

- YouGov (2019)

Not everyone has family and friends to spend the holidays with, and those of us who may have experienced the loss of a loved one may find Christmas particularly difficult. Social media also has a part to play as our feeds are bombarded with images of 'perfect' holidays.

1 in 6 people feel lonelier at Christmas than any other time of year, and this is more than double for those living with mental health conditions (39%). - Mind (2016)





Some of us may have a lot of people to fit into a small schedule and if we aren't able to give those people the time we want to, this can lead to feelings of guilt.

"I often find myself packing this time with trying to see everyone. I worry about others and fret about how I will manage to see everyone. This can lead to a stressful festive period when I should be using this time to rest and enjoy myself." - Niamh

We may be worried that our usual sources of support aren't available to us. Our therapists, friends, or other support services may have different schedules than usual or be dealing with their own festive stress.

Anxiety UK Helpline: 03444 775 774

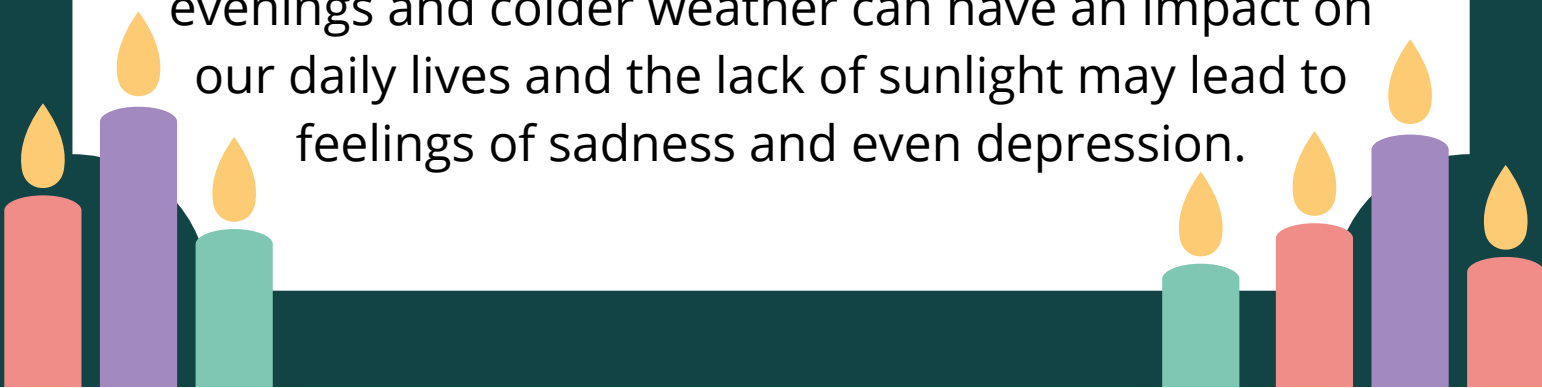
Our helpline will be there to support you:

12pm to 2pm - 26th and 27th December

9.30am to 5.30pm - 28th to 31st December

12pm to 2pm - 2nd January

For a lot of us, there may be no concrete reason why Christmas causes our anxiety to spike. Darker evenings and colder weather can have an impact on our daily lives and the lack of sunlight may lead to feelings of sadness and even depression.





Mindfulness

Christmas can be a very busy time, so it is important to take a couple of minutes to relax each day. Why not take a moment to complete these simple mindfulness exercises? They can help you refocus, acknowledge your own thoughts and feelings, and reinstate calm.



Take 5 minutes to notice 5 things in your day that usually go unnoticed...These can be objects, people, or events in your daily routine like the warm coat you have in the winter, the stillness of the morning after it has snowed, or the sound of the birds outside.

Have you ever acknowledged how these things benefit your life or the lives of others?

What would life be like without these things?

Mindfulness is an important practice for anyone, especially those of us who experience anxiety. With time, we are able to tune in with the present rather than the negative feelings and fears of the future.





Over Christmas it is common for our usual routines to be completely disrupted; we are busy with many different things and it is hard to keep track of all the events and planning that takes place. Try to plan some mindfulness into your day over the holidays.

"Getting outside for a walk feels so beneficial, even if the weather is bad. Just taking a moment in nature to breath. This exercise in turn helps me to sleep better!" - Hayley

Why not pop the wrapping paper down and try sitting quietly for a couple of minutes to do a quick scan?

Begin by focusing on your feet and how they feel against the ground. Now begin to scan slowly from your feet to your head, focusing on the sensations you feel through your body. Do you feel heavy or light? Warm or cool? Tingly or numb? Now begin letting yourself relax as you breath.

**If you feel that you need some more guided support to take a quick break in the day, then our online support groups will still be taking place over the festive season.
You are not alone!**





Lifestyle

Christmas can be a particularly hectic and stressful time. You might be under pressure to finish a project at work before taking some time off, or you might not get time off at all! Parents that have children home for the holidays may struggle to juggle their extra responsibilities with those excited children in tow. It's important to set your own pace and make sure you are taking care of your body and mind.

Sleep



Stress can majorly interfere with your sleep, leading to insomnia and restless nights. Make sure you give yourself time to unwind in the evening before bed; run a hot bath, read a book, or enjoy some herbal tea.

Make sure you are remembering to sit down, clear your head and have a rest during a busy day. Even taking five minutes away from a computer screen or a busy job will help you diffuse excess stress and unwind.

Rest





Eat



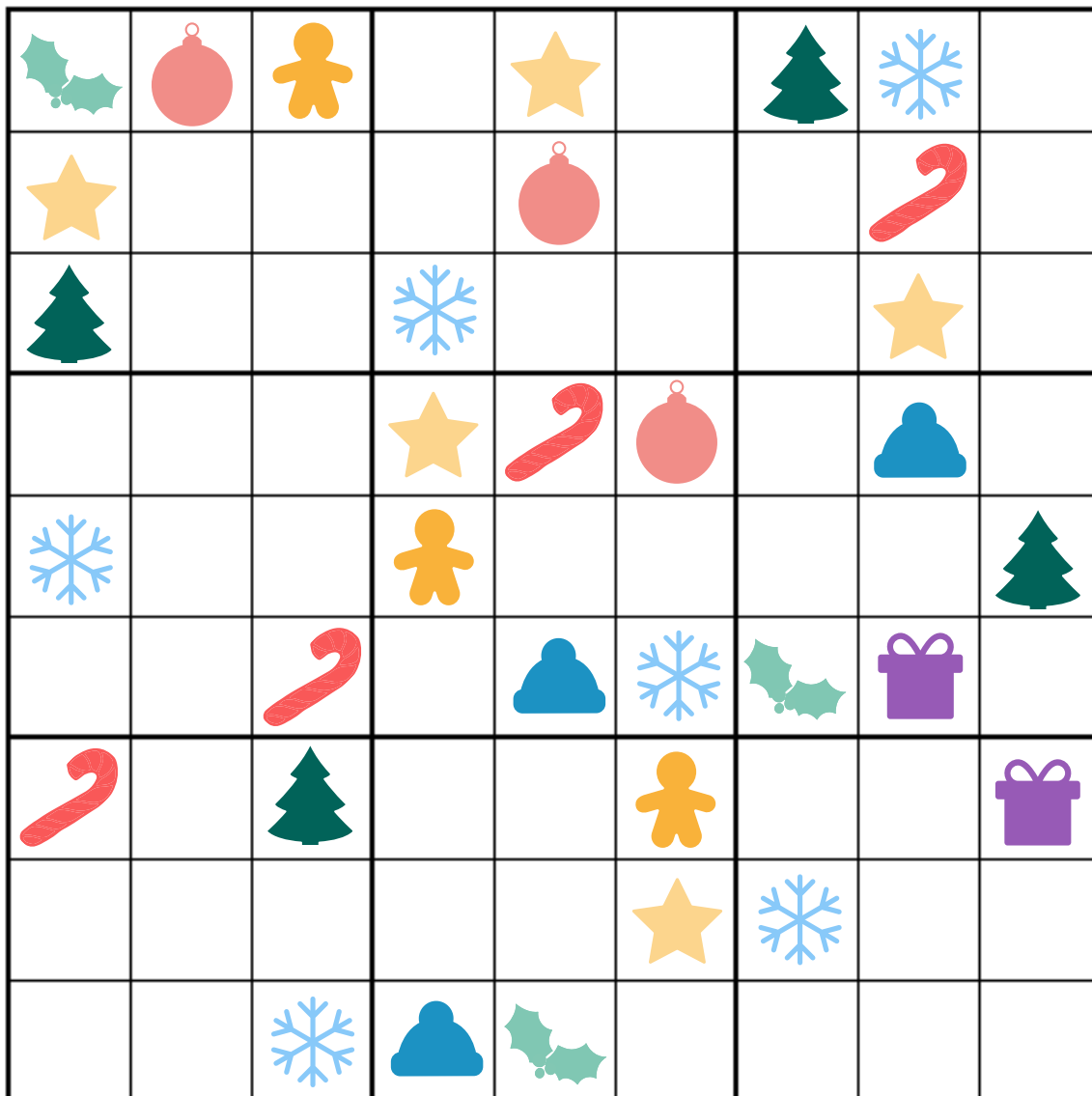
If you're someone who is prone to feeling guilty after eating, the holidays can be very hard. It's important to not punish yourself for enjoying a festive treat, but also not to feel pressured to overindulge if you don't want to. It takes about 20 minutes for our brain to let us know we are full, so let's pace ourselves and avoid a bloated boxing day. For more information on nutrition and anxiety, download our helpful [guide here!](#)

Anxiety can be an isolating experience that leads to self-doubt, low self-esteem and intrusive thoughts. The holidays can be especially difficult because it may seem like everyone around you is enjoying the season whilst you are struggling. Don't bottle up your feelings or feel pressured to pretend everything is fine. Confide in a trusted ally and make sure you're not suffering in silence.

Feel



Christmas Sudoku



Help Organise Christmas!

Sudoku is played on a grid of rows, columns, and squares (made up of 3 x 3 spaces). Each row, column and square needs to be filled out with the each Christmas item, without repeating any items within the row, column or square.

Answers on page 23



Christmas Cooking

Our Operations Director, Dave advocates cooking and baking as a mindfulness technique.

Mindful activities can be a great way of distracting yourself from the stress and worries of life and work. For me getting into the kitchen to make a tasty meal or bake a scrumptious cake can be so relaxing. Often when I get home from work the last thing I feel like doing is making dinner, but as soon as I get the chopping board out and start focusing on preparing the veg, I soon forget the woes and worries of the day as I concentrate on cutting the carrots and onions and not my fingers!

Baking can also be an extremely relaxing activity. Like other mindfulness techniques, baking draws your focus to smell and taste. The act of mixing ingredients together can be a relaxing experience as can be taking a rolling pin to ruminating thoughts! Plus, bakers gain the satisfaction of having created something new – and eating it too!






Pots, Plants, & Peace

Our Membership Manager, Pete enjoys mindful activities in the garden.

Whilst many might think that winter is not the time of year to be getting out into the garden, I couldn't disagree more. There is nothing like getting yourself outdoors and taking in all that nature has to offer at this time of year by doing a spot of gardening. Going outdoors at any time of year is good for one's wellbeing but in winter it is particularly invigorating, crisp and refreshing. Gardening allows you to really take your mind off anxiety by placing your focus and attention on something else. Indeed it's the ideal opportunity to do a spot of mindfulness; in fact more often than not, I find myself getting so immersed in gardening that I completely let go of life's every day stresses and instead find myself truly living in the moment. Getting fresh air by going outdoors is so good for the soul instead of staying cooped up in artificially heated indoor environments warmed by central heating.

So you might think that there's not much to do in the garden at this time of year because everything has died down and the ground is frozen. This isn't so however as there is always something to do in the garden all year round and at this time of year, there are still lots of jobs to do which if done now, will set your garden up for the months to come; your plants will thank you for it!



So here's my top 10 jobs to do in the garden on those days when you could really benefit from having some mental space away from anxious thoughts.

Harvest dead leaves from your garden and put them in the compost bin for next year - the nutrients will be great for the soil.

If you have had plants in the wrong place, now could be a good time to move them to the correct area of your garden.

Feed the birds by leaving food out for them; birds are an essential part of the ecosystem and contribute to the health of your garden.

Start by taking lots of hard wood cuttings during the winter months; the fruits of your labour will become apparent in the spring.

Remove any invasive or unwanted weeds that may have taken over your garden during the growing months.

Cover soft plants with plastic or other protective materials during the winter months; this shields them from harsh frosts.

Do not be afraid to cut back any plants; most will benefit from a good pruning.

Aerate your lawn (once you have raked off the leaves) - this will protect against it becoming waterlogged and boggy.

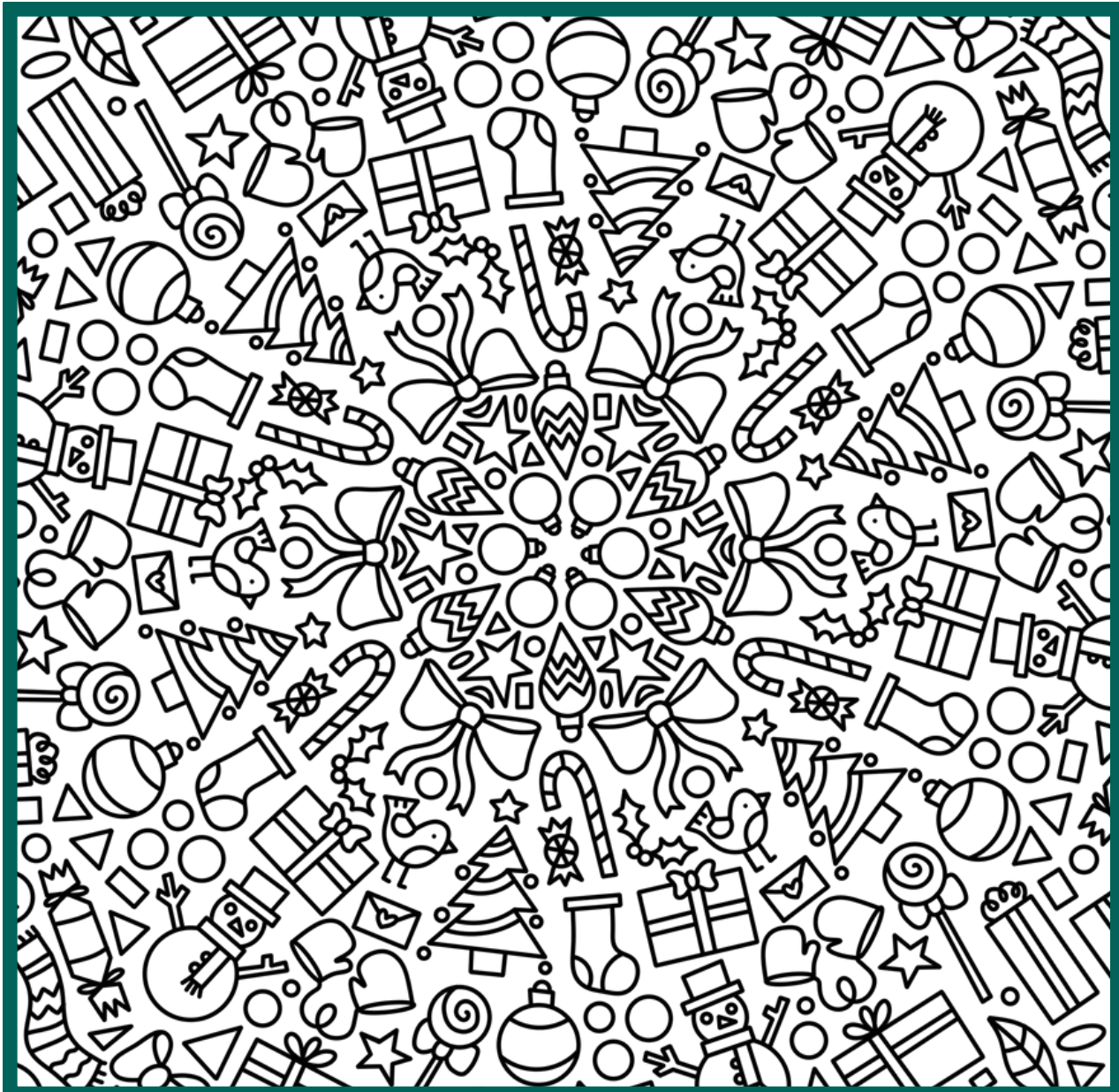
Harvest and regenerate your compost bins; turning over the contents to introduce air and encourage the composting process.

Put up a bat box in your garden. Bats are great as they are insectivores and love to eat small insects which might be pests in the summer.

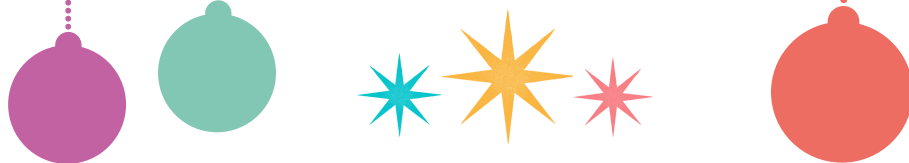


Colouring

Colouring and drawing can be a great mindfulness activity, allowing you to take a break and relax. It can have a similar effect to meditating, as it reduces the thoughts of an anxious mind.



If you find creativity a helpful outlet for your anxiety, then you may also find our Art for Anxiety Relief course helpful. More information on this can be found [here](#)!



Managing Expectations

Don't worry about things that are out of your control...

Anyone with anxiety knows this is easier said than done, but looking at your problems through a more pragmatic lens will help you determine what is a problem and what shouldn't be a problem. Your aunt and uncle arguing over Christmas dinner is unpleasant, but their actions are not your responsibility. Embrace the chaos of a large family gathering and accept that certain elements are out of your hands. Try to focus on only things you can change; like making sure you leave yourself enough time to travel somewhere on a certain day, or picking out a party outfit you feel awesome in.

Try to forget the notion of 'perfect'...

Everyone's experiences are different. Try not to get hung up on how you're supposed to feel or what you're supposed to be doing. Have the Christmas you want, and do the things that make you happy. You will inevitably burn the parsnips or make a joke that nobody laughs at. You might have an argument with your dad. Christmas can be as special or as normal as you want it to be, and it's ok for things to not go as planned.



Financial Anxiety

Get Organised

Be Realistic

Get Creative

It's important to draw up a plan of exactly how much money you are comfortable spending. Make a list of gift ideas for each person to avoid becoming side-tracked and overwhelmed when shopping. It is also becoming increasingly popular not to gift at all and to concentrate on the celebration!

It might sound cliché, but it really is the thought that counts when it comes to gift-giving. If you find yourself struggling to afford gifts for multiple people, why not suggest doing a Secret Santa and buying just one gift?

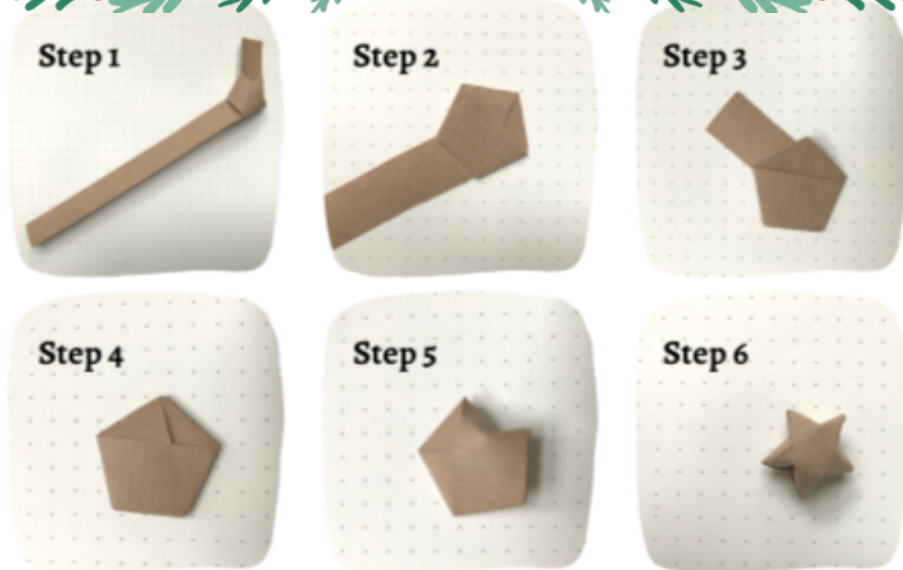
If you can't afford presents, you can try making your own gifts or creating something like a short story, letter or poem instead. Your time and effort is just as valuable as your money!





Little Stars

These origami stars are a perfect excuse to use your left over wrapping paper to make little decorations or gifts. All you need for this is paper cut into strips (we have used half an inch wide and about 7 inches long).



- 1** Tie a standard knot at one end of your paper by making a loop and pulling the small end through. Gently flatten the knot to create 3 of the 5 sides.
- 2** Tuck in the short end of the paper so it is in line with the edge (you can trim this a little if it doesn't fit).
- 3** Fold the long tail over and over again, keeping in line with the edges of the original pentagon.
- 4** Tuck in the end of the paper to keep the shape together (again you can trim this so it fits).
- 5** To get the points of the star, use your nail to pinch the edges to create little indents (this takes some practice).
- 6** Repeat for the other sides until you have a little star!



Why not write a message on the inside before folding?
Or attach them to a string to make a garland?



Wordsearch

M	N	M	I	K	A	I	A	T	G	I	F	T	S	S	A	W	H	W	T
H	D	I	M	F	S	U	R	D	S	Y	B	C	W	E	C	F	J	R	A
D	E	S	C	H	R	I	S	T	M	A	S	C	V	B	H	M	E	R	F
L	K	T	E	S	C	F	T	J	A	B	M	K	R	X	E	E	J	R	P
A	Z	L	Q	R	F	A	I	R	Y	L	I	G	H	T	S	B	T	L	D
S	T	E	B	F	R	S	Q	U	I	O	V	A	M	S	T	A	R	L	P
V	N	T	M	A	R	E	G	W	F	K	I	F	H	E	N	H	A	D	E
S	A	O	T	B	E	C	I	P	I	H	F	G	W	I	U	B	S	T	Y
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Y	T	I	N	S	E	L	C	T	M	Y	O	A	G	C	S	L	A	S	K
S	L	O	P	I	Y	T	A	E	I	J	A	D	V	A	Y	M	T	A	C
M	B	P	Y	E	O	A	N	U	T	C	R	A	C	K	E	R	K	S	O
L	P	U	D	D	I	N	G	A	P	T	S	E	T	G	F	T	K	T	T
N	A	K	O	E	S	I	T	S	Y	L	L	O	H	F	T	O	T	C	S

- | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. CHRISTMAS | 6. SLEIGH | 11. MINCEPIES | 16. STOCKINGS |
| 2. REINDEER | 7. CHESTNUTS | 12. TINSEL | 17. SNOWFLAKE |
| 3. GINGERBREAD | 8. FAIRYLIGHTS | 13. STAR | 18. TREE |
| 4. PUDDING | 9. MISTLETOE | 14. ELVES | 19. SCARF |
| 5. SPROUTS | 10. NUTCRACKER | 15. GIFTS | 20. HOLLY |

Can you find all the words?
Answers: page 24





Knitting



Knitting is another activity that many people find helpful when experiencing anxiety. It is a really useful distraction activity and can help you to forget about your anxiety for a little while and focus on something creative and rewarding. People of any age can give this a try and it is a wonderful new skill to learn!

We've teamed up with Beki Rymsza, founder of bespoke knitwear brand 'Where's Me Jumper', who has designed a Christmas jumper exclusively for Anxiety UK. Download the pattern [here](#) (all proceeds to Anxiety UK). We'd love to see as many of you as possible knitting your own version this Christmas!

Make sure to show us your handiwork, using **#AUKChristmas!**

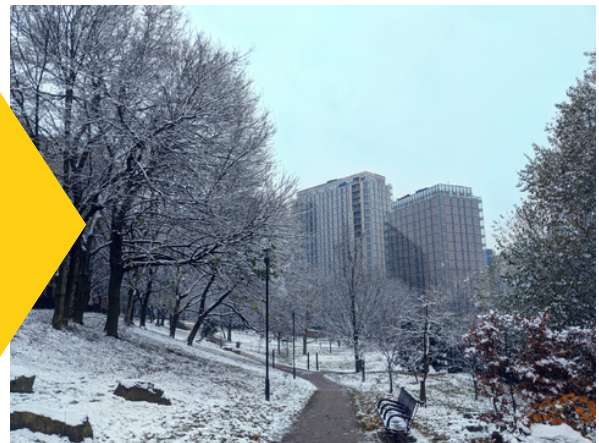




Get Walking

Walking is a great cardio exercise. The recommended amount is 150 minutes a week to help maintain a healthy lifestyle and encourage your brain to release endorphins. Walking has lots of benefits such as helping you to sleep better, improve your mood, and keep your heart healthy! Introducing walking into your daily routine will slowly help your body adapt without the intensity of overdoing it straight away. Why not start with a shorter walk building up to 30 minutes.

Why not take some photos whilst you are out? This one was taken by our Partnerships and Helpline Coordinator, Niamh

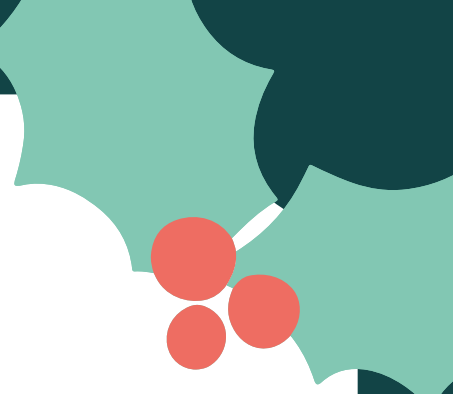


A brisk 10 minute walk has lots of health benefits. You could make a day of it, plan to do a long walk alone or with friends. Remember to pack water and healthy snacks for your travels! Try and challenge yourself to walk each day to improve your mood this winter.

Don't forget to wrap up warm!



Social Anxiety



It's OK to say no sometimes...

If you're dreading upcoming social events and you find yourself thinking about them constantly - you don't have to go.

Give people enough notice...

When cancelling an event - it's polite and helps other people manage their own anxiety by making them feel prepared!

Be honest...

About how you're feeling and explain why you can't make a particular event. Sometimes others aren't aware of the toll anxiety can take and it can be helpful to share.

Be open...

To future experiences. Cancelling plans can leave us feeling guilty. Explain that your anxiety is bad now, but you would like to reschedule or do something else instead.



Loneliness

Volunteer...

If you struggle with lack of human contact at Christmas, you can use the time to help others and make a difference. Please see details of our volunteering opportunities [here!](#)

Connect to your community...

If you are comfortable to do so, attending a local service at a church, mosque, synagogue or other place of worship will connect you with other people.

If you don't want to...

Remember that you are under no obligation to partake in the festivities and if it feels like just a regular day to you, then treat it like a regular day.

Reach out...

Find an online chat room to talk to others, or become a pen pal and send letters instead. Many helplines are also open over the Christmas period. If you have any questions, maybe [Anxia](#) can help?

[Anxiety UK Helpline: 03444 775 774](#)



Anxiety UK

We are open during the usual working hours of 9.30am - 5.30pm Monday to Friday with the exception of the following dates:

Monday 26th December

Tuesday 27th December

Monday 2nd January

If you are experiencing difficulties and need support you may find these contact numbers useful:

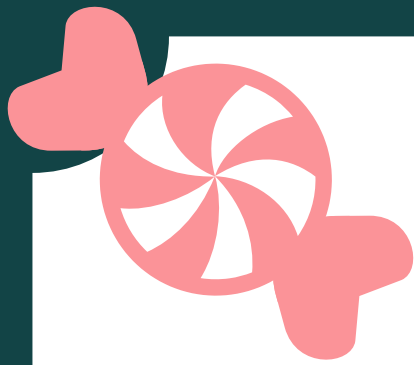
Samaritans (open 24 hours, 365 days per year) - **116 123**

HOPElineUK (open 9am - 10pm weekdays, 2pm - 10pm weekends, 2pm - 10pm bank holidays) - **0800 068 4141**

SHOUT 85258 is a free, confidential, anonymous text support service. You can text from wherever you are.

For medical support, please call the NHS non-emergency number on - **111**

For medical emergencies please contact - **999**



Answers



Christmas Sudoku

Sometimes if your feelings are out of order it helps to take a moment to sort them out into boxes!



Answers

Wordsearch

M	N	M	I	K	A	I	A	T	G	I	F	T	S	S	A	W	H	W	T
H	D	I	M	F	S	U	R	D	S	Y	B	C	W	E	C	F	J	R	A
D	E	S	C	H	R	I	S	T	M	A	S	C	V	B	H	M	E	R	F
L	K	T	E	S	C	F	T	J	A	B	M	K	R	X	E	E	J	R	P
A	Z	L	Q	R	F	A	I	R	Y	L	I	G	H	T	S	B	T	L	D
S	T	E	B	F	R	S	Q	U	I	O	V	A	M	S	T	A	R	L	P
V	N	T	M	A	R	E	G	W	F	K	I	F	H	E	N	H	A	D	E
S	A	O	T	B	E	C	I	P	I	H	F	G	W	I	U	B	S	T	Y
P	L	E	W	J	V	H	D	N	M	T	S	I	A	Q	T	B	E	T	R
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X	H	G	S	I	N	P	M	E	A	Y	T	R	Q	B	W	C	I	F	N
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L	P	U	D	D	I	N	G	A	P	T	S	E	T	G	F	T	K	T	T
N	A	K	O	E	S	I	T	S	Y	L	L	O	H	F	T	O	T	C	S

Taking some time to focus on something, no matter how small, can help regulate our feelings and reduce anxiety.





WISHING YOU
ALL A VERY

*Merry
Christmas*

FROM
EVERYONE AT...

Anxiety UK