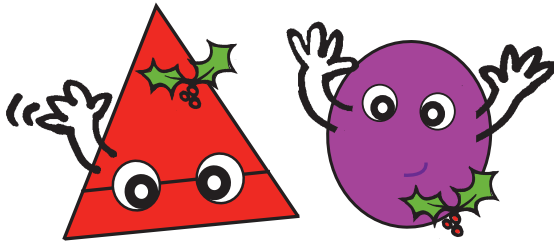


**Surviving  
Christmas  
and  
New Year**

# Surviving Christmas and New Year



## Why we wrote this booklet

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Lots of people have mixed feelings about Christmas and New Year or find it a difficult time of year.

- Some people like it, but worry about how to manage the cost.
- Some people like it but wish they had more people to share it with.
- Some people would like to avoid other people - or at least certain other people - at this time of year.
- Some people find it puts too much pressure on them and would prefer to avoid it.

If you have health problems or need support then this time can be even more difficult as there is so much happening while the places where you can usually get support are closed.

***“It looks as if everyone else seems to be enjoying themselves while you may feel left out.”***

***“When you ask around you find that lots of people find this a hard time of year. It was reassuring when I realised it was not just me.”***

***“You can feel under pressure to have fun, even though you don’t feel that way.”***

If any of this seems familiar, this booklet is for you. The suggestions here come from people who have been in these situations and want to share their tips on ways to survive the holiday period and hopefully have a better time than you were expecting. There are tips on:

- **How to plan for the holiday period.**
- **Access to services.**
- **How to check out the public transport arrangements, so you can get around.**
- **Ideas if you like to feel busy and would like to have more people around.**
- **Nice things to do if you are on your own.**
- **Things to do with family and friends that do not cost much.**
- **Coping with people and social occasions when you would rather avoid them.**
- **Keeping well and looking after yourself.**
- **Managing money at this time of year.**

People told us about what works for them in their local area. You will want to check out what is happening in your area – you can use suggestions in this book to get you started.

## Thanks

Many thanks to everyone at the Angus McFlourish project who helped us to produce this resource. The project aims to reduce loneliness and isolation for people living in Angus who have mental health problems. It is one of the projects supported by the Scottish Government's Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund.

People at Grampian Opportunities also helped by giving their suggestions too.

Some of the ideas and information here came from a booklet we developed a few years ago with the FAST group. FAST brought together people in West Dunbartonshire who live with addictions.

***“Christmas can be very stressful because on top of your depression or anxiety, or whatever it is, you have so much to do.”***

***“Some people have had a lot of bad experiences over Christmas and New Year. It's not a good time. It brings back memories like bereavements they've had. It's hard to deal with.”***

***“I used to go along with being all Christmassy and was miserable but I thought I had to or people would think I was a bit rude. Now I've decided not to care if people think I'm being rude.”***

## Tips on planning ahead

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- Plan what you need to do over the next few days, or the next week.
- Use this booklet to talk things over with a few friends or with a group if you go to one; plan what you can do together to look after yourselves and each other.
- You can also talk things over with a support worker or someone else you know through mental health services, if you find that helpful.
- Try to be aware of situations that are hard for you. That can help you plan how to avoid them, or have something good to help you at those times.
- Write down what your plan is. Put it somewhere you can see it.
- If you are reading this booklet and think that some of the ideas might be a bit late for this year, keep a hold of this as it might come in handy for next year. At the end of the booklet we've left some space for you to make notes on how to plan for next Christmas and New Year.

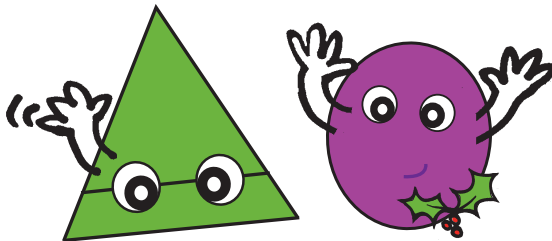
***“It’s normal to not remember everything. It’s OK to write stuff down. It’s really helpful.”***

**“Just don’t have a 25th of December in your house. Have the 24th twice and go straight on to the 26<sup>th</sup>. It might help not telling other people you do that in case they think you’re a bit strange. But it works.”**

**“Christmas and New Year are times when most people have less money than usual and worrying about money can affect your mental health. But talking over these ideas showed that it doesn’t have to be that way.”**

**“If you realise that you missed something good, make a note of it at the back of our booklet so you can plan to do it next year.”**

**“It can be a hard time of year. But it can also be a good excuse to do the silly things you want to do other times but don’t. So this year, just go ahead.”**



## Access to Services over the Holidays

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In Scotland most care and support services will be closed for the two public holidays at both Christmas and New Year. This means that some services can be closed for four days, which can feel like a really long time.

Some of the other services, such as support services that give care at home and emergency services, will still be giving support. So the first tip is to check out what will be happening to the services that you use.

### Tips for before the holidays

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- If you have a support worker, talk to them about what help you might need over the holidays.
- Come up with a plan for how you will cope and what you can do to keep well.
- Get the phone numbers of the out of hours and any services that will be available. Save this on your phone or put it somewhere you can find it easily, like on your fridge.

*“My medication runs out between Christmas and New Year so I can find that really stressful. It’s good to have plans in place over Christmas in case things go wrong, especially with things like medication, so you can just relax.”*



## Tips and hints for during the holiday period

- Remember the services will be open again in a few days.
- Contact the out of hours services if you need to talk to someone.

### Out of hours and telephone support services

**Samaritans** are a 24 hours phone line for people having a difficult time. Their free phone line is open every day of the year. If you're feeling a bit down you can give them a call on 116 123.

**Breathing Space** is the helpline in Scotland for people who want to talk to someone about their mental health and wellbeing. Their helpline is 0800 838 587.

### Ordinary Community Services

Lots of people find that ordinary community services give good support when you have a mental health problem. Going for a walk or a swim, playing football or using libraries are all good ways to keep well. They are especially good over the Christmas and New Year period when it can be harder to keep active or find things to do.

***“Go to the library on the week before the holidays and stock up on books, DVDs and CDs to keep you busy.”***

*“Sometimes making a decision about doing something small, like going for a walk or reading a book in your room, can help you to feel like you have taken control of the situation and given yourself the chance to breath. It can actually have a really great impact on your wellbeing and give you more confidence. That’s what I have found”.*

## Tips and hints

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- If you like places that feel busy and Christmassy you could do some of the following:
- Go and see the Christmas lights in your area. Look on your local Council’s website to find out when they are switched on and go along.
- Go to the big shopping centres. There are great window displays you can enjoy looking at for free.
- Take a wintery walk looking at everyone’s Christmas lights.
- Enjoy all the free things that the Council is putting on, like carol concerts.
- Check out all the things that are on in places like local churches and the community centres.

## Getting around – access to transport

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Most of us will want to use public transport at some point, to get to do things or to see people.

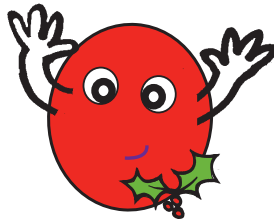
Check what is happening for bus and train services as there will be fewer services than usual on some days.

The number to ring to check for services anywhere in Scotland is 0871 200 2233 but this costs 12p per minute. You can also check their website [www.travelinescotland.com](http://www.travelinescotland.com).

### Tips and hints

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- Think ahead about transport for anything over Christmas or the first few days in January.
- Look at options for sharing a taxi, getting an Uber or seeing if someone can give you a lift.
- If you are going to a support group that is on over the holidays, phone the contact person beforehand to find out if you can share transport with other people.



## Nice things to do with families or friends

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Being with people is good. But sometimes people avoid it because it is expensive or feels like too much work. It doesn't need to be like that.

### Tips and hints for good things to do

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- Make things like Christmas cards with glitter and little bits of cotton wool for snow. If you go shopping for things with someone who is also keen, then you can buy big tubs of glitter and glue more cheaply than buying smaller ones.
- Have a film party. Get all your friends round to watch a film. Why not dress up as characters from the film and sing along to the songs?
- Do outings in a group as you can often get cheaper deals for the cinema or theatre if you book for more people.
- Go for a walk or play football or other sports together.
- Ask friends round for tea and a biscuit – a break from big meals can be really nice.
- Have a BYOE party (Bring Your Own Everything) where your guests bring some food and anything they'd like to drink. This way you can share and it's not expensive for you to cater for everyone.

## Tips on how to get started

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- Think about what you enjoy and how you can do it with other people if that's what you'd like.
- Don't feel you have to include everyone or a big group. It could just be you and one or two pals.
- Talk it over. Ask people what they enjoy and once you get talking you'll come up with things that you all enjoy doing.

*"Have a craft day with your friend. It's really fun and a great way to save money too. This year my friend and I are going to paint our own Christmas bunting."*

*"I love going for walks in the winter when it's all frosty."*

*"Keep going for a swim or playing football – all the things you do the rest of the year. And if you don't do them, start now."*

*"Have a bring and share meal. When everyone brings some food then it works out much cheaper for everyone. And you get to try some new food as well!"*

## Coping with family and social occasions

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We know that it can sometimes be hard to spend time with your family, for lots of different reasons. Later on in this booklet, you'll see some tips for things to do on your own. There might be times when you have to cope with being around your family though, so here are some ideas of things you can do to help you make it work well for you.

### Tips and hints

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- For some people staying busy is a good way to cope if you're feeling overwhelmed. If this would help you then you could offer to give a hand in the kitchen or with the washing up.
- See if you can bring a friend or partner with you who will make you feel better. If not, see if there's a friend you can text for support while you're with your family.
- Remember that you can leave when you want and that you will be home again soon.
- If there is a photo or picture that makes you feel happy or calm, make this the background photo or screen saver on your phone so you can look at it to cheer you up.
- If you need to get a moment to yourself then it's OK to say you need to pop out for some fresh air or to go for a short walk.

**“If my family asks me to do something like go to the shops, that’s really helpful because then I’m involved and helping.”**

**“I can do it if I know I have option of a bit of time to myself, even just 10 minutes quiet in another room or outside. My family and close friends know that now.”**

**“I find seeing relatives stressful because it’s a long journey. I’ve found that, to make it less stressful, I make sure my taxi and anything else is arranged in advance so I know the journey is organised.”**

**“I just tell people I have to get back early to feed the cat or walk the dog that I’m looking after for a friend. That works.”**

**“Try to plan in some quiet time for yourself. Just tell other people you have something already planned for that day if you know it is not right for you.”**

## Tips and hints for going to parties

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- If you don't like going to parties by yourself, take a friend with you.
- Leave when you are ready to go.
- If you are visiting a friend or relatives who you find difficult to be around, plan for a shorter visit, tell them you need to be away early.
- If you know that there could be a problem – which could be people who get you upset as well as there being an activity happening that makes you uncomfortable – don't go. Or go for a short time.
- Remember to eat. Eat before you go out, especially if you'll be drinking.

*"If you're with family or friends and they start acting in ways you don't like, just leave."*

*"I find it easier not to state a time I have to leave but just mention that I can't be too long as I have to pop in and see someone on the way home. That way if you are hating being with other people or things are starting to deteriorate then you can cut short your time. Equally if you are enjoying the party you can stay a bit longer."*



***“Share lifts to parties to make getting there easier and cheaper.”***

## **Nice things to do on your own**

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It is a good idea to plan things that you enjoy doing on your own. We know that some people prefer to be on their own at this time of year. Having a bit of quiet time is also good for everyone.

### **Tips and hints**

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- **Watch a favourite film that makes you feel good and you can cry or laugh along with it.**
- **Play your favourite music.**
- **Get some nice smelly pampering stuff then have a long soak in the bath.**
- **Go for a walk to your favourite place or go somewhere you want to see but haven't been to before.**
- **Some people find meditation is good – a nice thing to do and good for keeping well. There are lots of free apps for this or you could go to a local meditation group.**
- **Have your favourite food.**

- Make cards and decorations for the house to make it look special and Christmassy, if you want to do it. This can be a great way to get creative. Websites like Pinterest have loads of ways to decorate your home to make it look lovely without spending a lot of money.
- Look out for fitness offers. Keeping well physically can be great for your mental health. Over the holidays lots of gyms offer free passes to swim or use the gym. Anytime Fitness, the YMCA, Virgin Active have also have free day passes at any time of the year.
- Make a Christmas playlist on YouTube of all your favourite festive songs and play it when you want to feel Christmassy. (This works at any time of the year.)
- Talk to a friend – phone, email, Skype or whatever – if you both want to do that. You can be with people even though you are not in the same room.

***“Pamper yourself with a nice bath with lovely smelling potions and lotions. It’s a great way to escape for an hour or so”.***

***“Have fun things in your diary in the lead up to Christmas so you can enjoy it.”***

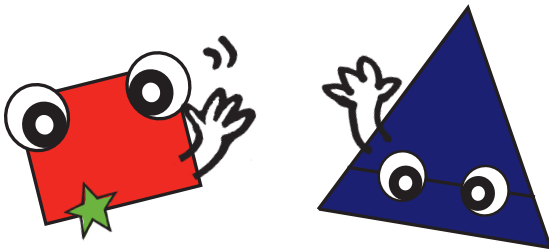
*"I go for a walk and collect some holly and attach it to a wreath made from a coat hanger. Another idea is to find some pine cones and spray them gold or silver and put them around your home. Think Blue Peter."*

*"The older you get, the more you lose your spark for Christmas so it's important that you do things that make you feel like a kid again."*

*"Give yourself a present. Last year I got Netflix and I enjoyed it since without feeling guilty. And friends come round and enjoy it too."*

*"Sometimes by the time Christmas comes around I haven't had time to relax so I don't feel Christmassy."*

*"Wrapping presents is stressful. You need to make sure you have enough Sellotape and wrapping paper."*



## Tips for New Year

Some of the people we met said that New Year's Eve can be a really difficult time, especially if you don't have plans and might be feeling a bit lonely. We also know that it is a time of the year when people drink more alcohol than usual so it can be harder to keep looking after your mental and physical health.

Some people find it best to just treat Hogmanay like any other time. Other people might enjoy celebrating a new beginning in a different way.

### Tips for New Year

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- You could treat yourself to making sure the year starts in a way that feels best for you, so you can feel optimistic about the future.
- Spend some extra time cleaning your home, or rearranging the furniture so you can wake up to a fresh start.
- If you'd rather not think about this time of year, why not watch a scary film or get into a new series on telly.

***“Be prepared. If you know you’ll be needing transport to go somewhere this evening, then book it in advance.”***

*"I switch off the telly and usually go to bed before the Hogmanay stuff starts and get up and go for a walk the next morning. By noon I'm getting on with my day and feeling OK. It's a lot better than I used to feel."*

*"My new year's resolution this year is to be nicer to myself and to remember all the good things in my life. And take more photos on days out, friends, my cat and so on. Then I can look at them when I'm having a not-so-good spell and remember that there will be better times again."*

## **How to stay well**

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We know that Christmas is a time of excess for a lot of people, so it can feel harder to look after your physical and mental health. These are our tips but you know yourself better than anyone so you can decide the best options for you and what you are comfortable with.

*"I always get stressed out about the mess on Christmas day so I have a black bag ready to throw away all the wrapping paper and rubbish as we go."*

## Tips and hints for looking after yourself generally

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- Plan ahead, so you are not too stressed.
- Make sure you have enough food in to last you over the days when the shops are shut. If you've got food at home and are looking after yourself it's easier to cope with all the other aspects of your life.
- Also remember to stock up with other things that help you be well – like any medicines you take or remedies for colds and flu.
- Try to stay on top of laundry and cleaning, even if you're busier than usual, so things don't build up.
- Get into a pattern that keeps you well before the holidays start – like going for a walk each day and eating well.

*"I always knew that if the fridge was full I'd be able to cope better."*

*"It can be helpful to break things down into little jobs so it doesn't all seem like too much. Write down a list and tick it off as you go."*

## Food and drink

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People who have mental health problems can sometimes not eat a healthy balanced diet. It's important that you eat the right food to keep you well. Winter is also a time when you just feel you need warm comforting food to keep out the cold. These are our suggestions to help you eat well and feel good.

*"I like to make a big pot of food which then I can use for a few days. It also means when I am not feeling too good I can microwave the food quickly."*

*"When you plan your meals you'll buy a lot less food so you can buy nicer and better quality food."*

*"Planning meals helps. Otherwise you buy too much and it goes off."*

*"Remember that you can shop up to Christmas and in between Christmas and New Year. The shops are open more now than they used to be. You'll only really need to have food in for three days, so you avoid the busy shops, so you don't need to stress."*

## Tips and hints

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- Have enough healthy food in, so you aren't just eating treats.
- Think about sharing food with a friend or neighbour. It could be doing your shopping together so you can split 2 for 1 offers. Or it could be sharing the cooking, even if you decide you both want to eat dinner on your own.
- Soup is a great way to get lots of vitamins and use up any leftover vegetables you have. Keep it in the fridge for a few days and just take it out and heat what you need.
- Remember to stock up on food like bread, rice and pasta. They make food go further and keep you going if you get snowed in or the shops are shut for longer than you expected.
- Get in vegetables and fruit. Canned options can be just as healthy (as long as you don't buy fruit in syrup) and can last a long time. Stocking up on frozen veg (and stock cubes) means you can make a healthy soup any time you're feeling peckish.
- Look up recipe cards in supermarkets, they give you all the information you need for making something. These make shopping easy and usually include food that isn't too expensive.



## Our recipes

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### Melting snowman biscuits

- Buy a pack of cheap biscuits, like Sainsbury's Basics Rich Tea biscuits for 30p.
- Make some icing and lay the biscuits on some kitchen towel.
- Put a marshmallow on top of each biscuit.
- Using either food colouring or little tubes of coloured icing, paint on a snowman's face, coal buttons and stick arms.



*“Making food is a great way to look after yourself and look after your friends.”*

## Rudolph cakes with pretzel antlers

- Make some chocolate cakes (or buy some) and decorate them with chocolate icing.
- Use chocolate covered pretzels for antlers, cut up marshmallows for eyes and smarties and chocolate buttons for noses.



Chefs like Jack Munroe make sure their recipes don't cost a lot to make (like the mushroom and spinach bolognese that costs 38p per portion) and are available online. Why not spend some time making something new and invite a friend round to share it with? <https://cookingonabootstrap.com/>

***“Last year I spent most of a day cooking. The time whizzed by and I'd all this nice food at the end of it. I felt that pleased with myself.”***

## Christmassy drinks

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- Treat yourself to a hot chocolate with a bit of cinnamon mixed in and top with whipped cream. If you drink alcohol, you could add a shot of baileys too.
- Mix cranberry juice with orange juice and soda water or lemonade.
- Heat up some apple juice with water and some cinnamon or cloves.

## Tropical punch

- Get some cans of fruit in their own juice - grapefruit and pineapple would be good. You'll also need some tropical fruit juice and some soda water.
- Cut up the fruit and mix the juice from the cans with some of the soda water.
- If you'd like to make this alcoholic, you could add some vodka or gin.

## Ways to cut the cost of presents

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### Tips and hints

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- Agree or set a budget – such as £5, which everyone can stick to just try to be as imaginative as possible.
- Have a look on websites like Gumtree, eBay or Freecycle for cheap or free things.
- Instead of getting a present for everyone, try a Secret Santa and each person buys something for just one person.
- Gift boxes can be bought really cheaply online – look around. You could buy things like big packs of sweets or a pack of toys from a supermarket or pound shop and share them out into nice boxes for any children you want to buy presents for.
- Make a list of all the things you really want – including the really practical things that you might usually feel too embarrassed to ask for, like socks. Give your family and friends your list and ask them for one thing off your list.
- Have presents that just need you to give your time, like offering to iron for someone or help them with gardening.

- Have a present swap with friends or family a few weeks before Christmas. Everyone can bring along things that they have but don't want or need anymore – like clothes that don't fit or a DVD you've already watch a lot. You can then swap these and not worry about seeming rude as you appreciated the gift at the time but now someone else will enjoy it. You can keep the things you get or give them as presents to other people.
- Look for presents in charity shops.
- Go shopping with a friend if there are offers like 2 for 1 on toys or clothes so you can split the cost.
- If you are good at cooking or baking, homemade food is a good present. You can also use up leftover smaller pieces of wrapping paper and ribbons to make these look nice.

*“When someone has a mental health problem, it can be difficult to stay on top of household chores so offering to help with those can be a really great present.”*

*“Give foodie things as presents.”*

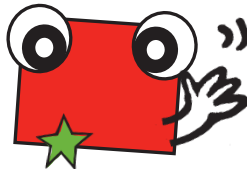
**“It really is lovely to receive a token present – even a package of biscuits or mince pies which have been wrapped up – it makes it feel like people care.”**

**“Make photo frames out of cardboard boxes that you paint and decorate with things like cinnamon sticks and star anise and give them as gifts. They smell great.”**

**“Cut out nice parts of your Christmas cards, like robins, and use them for gift tags.”**

**“Spread out buying and wrapping presents. This will mean you don’t need to spend lots of money buying everything at once and wrapping them all together can feel overwhelming. Take your time and don’t try to do everything at once.”**

**“Buy wrapping paper, gift bags, decorations and presents in the January sales. You’ll save loads of money.”**



## Money advice

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One of the big pressures for many people is managing money and not getting into debt. It can be difficult to balance having a nice time with making sure you're not spending more money than you should. Hopefully you can use this guide to see that you can have fun at Christmas and New Year without spending a lot of money. But we understand that when money is already tight, even spending small amounts on extra things can mean spending money you don't have.

***“See if you can save a small amount of money each month, even £5 a month. Even if you save a tiny amount, like a pound or two, that teaches you how to save and will encourage you to save up money for Christmas presents through the year.”***

***“Make sure you pay bills on time and save up extra for Christmas if you can. If you don't pay your bills on time it will cause you extra stress over Christmas.”***

***“Don't be tempted to buy too much food or drink. Just buy what you need.”***

***“Don’t pay by card. Write a shopping list and take out the money that you’ll need for everything on the list so you’ll need to stick to it.”***

***“Work out, in advance, how much money you need for different occasions or for Christmas and New Year all together. Add an extra £20 to this in case there is anything extra you might need.”***

## **Tips and hints**

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- Citizens Advice Scotland can help with money advice and with negotiating with the people you owe money to. Go to <http://www.cas.org.uk/> to find your local branch.
- If you need to borrow money, talk to the credit union about whether they will give you a loan – the interest will be a lot less than other sources of credit.
- Try to start planning ahead for next year. Look at ways to save money during the year. The credit union can help here too.
- Association of British Credit Unions  
Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester,  
M60 0AS  
0161 832 3694  
[info@abcul.org](mailto:info@abcul.org)



## **My notes**

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**For this year**

**For next year**

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