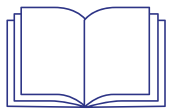


Supporting Someone With MCAS at Christmas:

A Practical Festive Guide for Loved-Ones

The festive season can be joyful — but for people living with Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS), it can also bring extra challenges. With a little understanding, flexibility, and kindness, you can make a real difference.

This guide offers simple, thoughtful ways to help your loved one feel included, supported, and safe over the Christmas period. Small actions matter - and they can help everyone enjoy the season together.



Understanding MCAS

MCAS is a condition where certain immune cells, called mast cells, release too many inflammatory chemicals, called mediators, too often. This causes many different symptoms, such as itching, hives, stomach pain, headaches or trouble breathing. Triggers vary, and can include certain foods, stress, temperature changes, strong smells or infections.

As a result, festive traditions that many people take for granted - like sharing a meal and lighting scented candles - can sometimes cause discomfort or reactions.

Symptoms can flare quickly and unpredictably, so flexibility and calm support are key.

You can learn more about MCAS with our [Quick Guide](#), our in-depth [Support Guide](#) for Loved Ones, or by visiting our [website](#).



Planning Together



Discuss early in the year what your loved one needs to stay well and comfortable - consider food plans, visiting times and the home environment.



Listen and believe them if they say something doesn't work for them; they know their body best



Check how they're feeling about the season - they might be balancing excitement with worry about reactions and energy levels.



Be flexible, remember that energy levels and symptoms can change day to day.



Have backup plans e.g. smaller gatherings, a short doorstep chat, a video call or a festive film night online.



Understand that they may need to cancel plans at short notice. Let them know it's okay, and you'd still love to connect another way.





Festive Food Made Safe

Food can be one of the biggest challenges for many people with MCAS. Reactions can happen even to small amounts of triggering ingredients, spices, or cooking methods - and holiday meals often include unfamiliar foods, long ingredient lists, or shared dishes that make things more complicated. Your loved one may need to bring their own food, prepare their meal separately, or eat something entirely different from everyone else. They might also need to avoid certain smells in the kitchen or keep a safe distance while food is being served.

This isn't about being fussy or difficult. It's a medical need - and it's how they keep themselves safe and well enough to enjoy the day. Being understanding and supportive can make a huge difference to how included and relaxed they feel.

✓ **Ask early what foods are safe for them,** and check whether they'd prefer to bring their own meal. Knowing you're happy to make accommodations can make the whole occasion feel much less stressful and more enjoyable.

✓ **Share ingredient lists or recipes ahead of time** so they can flag any concerns.

✓ **Some people with MCAS struggle with histamine.** Foods sitting around for a long time can build histamine, so freshly cooked dishes are better for them.

✓ **Avoid cured or processed meats** (e.g. ham, sausages, smoked salmon), which are often difficult for people with MCAS

✓ **Be cautious with gravies, stocks, sauces and marinades** - these can hide ingredients like wine, yeast extract, or spice mixes.

✓ **If you're cooking for everyone,** keep seasoning minimal and serve extras (like herbs or sauces) separately so your loved one can adapt their own plate.

✓ **You can still make things feel special** use Christmas crockery, add safe sides or adapt classic dishes with swaps (e.g. fresh roast chicken instead of turkey leftovers).

✓ **Stick to fresh, plain ingredients where possible** - freshly cooked meat or fish, simple veg, and safe oils.

✓ **Encourage your loved one to bring or suggest their favourite safe** so they don't miss out when others are enjoying desserts or snacks.

✓ **Don't pressure your loved one to "just try a bit" or to eat foods they're unsure about** - even small amounts can trigger symptoms.



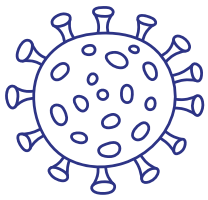
Safe Sips for the Season

✓ **Alcohol is a common MCAS trigger,** so offer non-alcoholic options such as still or sparkling water, tolerated herbal teas, or safe fruit-infused water.

✓ **Avoid pre-mixed or flavoured drinks** with preservatives, sulphites or colourings.

✓ **Create a simple "mocktail"** using tolerated ingredients (e.g. sparkling water with a splash of pear or apple juice if safe).

✓ **A warm caffeine-free drink can bring comfort and calm.**



Staying Well This Winter

People with MCAS can react strongly to even mild infections, so they may need to be extra cautious during cold and flu season.

- ✓ **Let them know if you're unwell** - even if it's "just a cold". Be honest about symptoms or recent exposure. They can then decide what feels safe for them.
- ✓ **Find a safe way to connect** - outdoors, online, or through a doorstep visit.
- ✓ **Be understanding** if they ask you to test for Covid before meeting or to wear a mask.
- ✓ **Keep up good hygiene** with regular handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes and using sanitiser.
- ✓ **Show care through small gestures** - a message, card, or doorstep drop-off can mean a lot when meeting in person isn't possible.



Creating a Safe Environment

- ✓ **Avoid wearing perfume, aftershave, or fragranced products** when seeing your loved one.
- ✓ **Skip scented candles, air fresheners and essential oils if they're visiting.** Even "natural" scents can be triggers.
- ✓ **If decorating, check whether real trees, tinsel, or certain lights might be problematic for your loved one.** You could try an alternative such as a paper tree, a metal or wire tree, or a simple branch display decorated with lights.

- ✓ **Good ventilation helps** - open windows or air purifiers can make a big difference.
- ✓ **Create a quiet space where your loved one can rest or take a break.**
- ✓ **Be mindful of over-stimulation** - flashing lights and loud music can trigger sensory overload. Choose soft, steady lighting and keep noise at a comfortable level.



Gift-giving

- ✓ **Some common gifts like scented candles, skincare, or food items may trigger reactions.**
- ✓ **Ask what kinds of gifts are safe or appreciated** - or check out our gift guide (overleaf) for more ideas.
- ✓ **Don't worry about finding the "perfect" gift** - your understanding and presence are the most meaningful thing you can give.



Emotional Support

- ✓ **Christmas can bring up feelings of loss or frustration when old traditions aren't possible.** Acknowledge that - you don't need to fix it, just listen.
- ✓ **Celebrate what is possible, rather than what's missing.**
- ✓ **Respect their limits** - let them rest or step away when needed.
- ✓ **Remember that MCAS can be unpredictable.** Your patience and steady reassurance help more than you might realise.
- ✓ **Supporting someone with a chronic condition can be emotional.** Allow yourself to rest, and remember that your care makes a real difference.

Gift Ideas for People with MCAS



Comfort & Cosy Living

- Heated blanket or heat pad
- Weighted blanket
- Soft, breathable pyjamas or loungewear - natural fibres like cotton or bamboo are often more tolerable
- Warm socks, slippers, or a hot water bottle

Calm & Entertainment

- Book or eBook - uplifting stories, gentle reads, or something inspiring
- Puzzle books, crosswords or gentle games
- Journal, gratitude diary, or creative writing notebook
- Art supplies - watercolours, colouring books, or simple craft kits that don't use strong glues or scents

Wellbeing & Self-Care

- Mindfulness or meditation app subscription - e.g. Calm, Headspace or Insight Timer
- Massage tools or acupressure mat
- Breathwork cards or gentle yoga cards
- Cooling or warming eye mask

Food & Drink

- Ceramic or stainless steel travel mug
- Gift basket of safe foods (i.e. tolerated teas, or homemade low-histamine snacks)
- Personalised recipe binder

Connection & Thoughtfulness

- Custom photo book
- Personalised playlist or CD
- Letters or "open when" cards - thoughtful notes for hard days
- Handmade coupon book - e.g. "cosy film night", "board game afternoon", "a mini spa at home"

Subscriptions & Memberships

- Audible, Libro.fm or Scribd - Audi
- Netflix, Disney+ or Prime Video
- Curiosity Stream - Gentle, educational documentaries
- Bookishly/ Books That Matter / Rare Birds Book Club - Gentle book subscription boxes
- Skillshare / Domestika / Creativebug - gentle online classes (art, journalling, photography, writing, crafts)
- Theatre at Home / National Theatre Live
- Magazine subscription - e.g. nature, wellbeing or art-based magazines
- Stationery subscription



Your kindness, flexibility and willingness to adapt make the season brighter and safer. What your loved one needs most is you - your understanding, acceptance and care.



For further guidance and resources see the Mast Cell Action website
(www.mastcellaction.org).



Make your legacy a lifeline for people with MCAS, leave a gift in your will to Mast Cell Action.