

## **Holidays**

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The holidays can be a very difficult time for those of us with eating disorders. The emphasis on spending time with family members we may struggle with, the focus on an endless variety of foods and eating traditions, as well as strong emotions, can present a whole host of challenges to our recovery and it is not uncommon to see an increase in symptoms and behaviors as the season approaches. Take a deep breath and ask yourself what kind of holiday you would like to have. What would you like to have different from past holidays? Imagine your life as you would like it to be in recovery.

**Here are a few tools to help you have a more peaceful and recovery focused holiday:**

### **Taking Control of Your Eating and Your Health**

- Plan to eat 3 nutritionally balanced meals and at least 1 snack a day to help reduce the chance of a binge or focusing on food too much. Allow yourself to continue your regular recovery routine.
- Get plenty of rest and avoid alcohol.
- Look at any distorted thoughts, often in the form of black & white thinking and catastrophizing, and work through these with a friend, sponsor, or therapist.
- Resist “good” and “bad” labels for food. Think instead in terms of reasonable portion sizes and everything in variety, moderation, and balance. Holiday food is meant to be enjoyed. Remember to think about the love that went into the meal.
- Anticipate situations that will make it harder to eat normally such as travelling, and plan accordingly. Be prepared to be flexible.
- Don’t skip meals in an attempt to make up for what was recently eaten or is about to be eaten. This strategy often results in overeating at emotionally vulnerable times.
- Continue with a sensible exercise routine, but remember to be flexible. Structure is important, but recovery does not depend on rigid routines.

- Allow yourself some “treats”. Deprivation is not self-care.
- Eat when hungry and stop when moderately full. This sometimes requires enormous persistence and faith to learn and practice, but self-trust and wholeness depend upon it. Consistent nutrition is essential for recovery.
- Try not to count calories and avoid the scale.
- Stay in touch with your dietitian and/or counselor if you are working with one. Talking about food concerns openly with such resources is healthy, and can help you prepare and plan for difficult situations.
- If travelling means missing your support network, arrange to talk by phone, email, or Skype.
- Remind yourself if you binge, purge, overeat, or restrict, that this behavior will decrease with healthier attitudes and eating practices. Be patient with yourself. Rather than dwell on problems, remain calm and then do the next right thing.

### **Standing on Solid Emotional Ground**

- The holidays often bring up a wealth of unexpected (and possibly unwelcome) feelings. Notice your feelings and write them down for later consideration, rather than reacting directly with people who may be hurt. The holidays can be a great source of material for a Fourth Step.
- Develop willingness to look at things differently. Recovery is about feelings, not food, but we can’t reason or build trust when bingeing, purging, or starving.
- Avoid comparing yourself to others. Regardless if it’s about appearance or life achievements, it’s not productive to measure yourself against someone else.
- Volunteer your services at a charitable organization. There are many people in your community who could benefit from your time and attention. Helping others is a great way to build recovery.

- Begin each day connecting with your Higher Power or doing some meditation, even if it’s only for a few minutes. This practice can help us gain focus and be something to help us find our emotional footing more quickly during the day.
- Do not be afraid to set boundaries with others, including food boundaries, and anticipate times and places that cause you stress. Be prepared and pre-plan choices regarding where you will and won’t attend and stand by your decisions.
- Recognize there are things you can’t, and can, control about the holidays: you can’t control people, the calendar, time or the weather. However, you can control your reactions to others, the amount of time you spend with specific people, whether or not you attend meetings, and whether you leverage resources that can help.
- “A meeting, is a meeting, is a meeting”. It doesn’t matter what type of 12-Step meeting you attend you can still find recovery focused support in many communities. Larger urban centers often have daily or even hourly (marathon) meetings during the holidays. Be honest about your emotions, and listen to others: you are likely to find others who have been through something like what you are experiencing.
- Use recovery tools (see “Recovery Tools” and “Additional Suggestions for Recovery” on the publications tab at [www.4EDA.org](http://www.4EDA.org).)
- Use “bookends”: Talk with a support person before you attend an event, then check in again afterwards. Take a phone list with you and use it if feeling overwhelmed.
- Have a way out: If possible, drive yourself so you can leave right away and go someplace safe, or plan ahead and tell the host “I can only stay for an hour.”

- Hug someone and share a laugh every day. Radiating kindness can go a long way toward making you, as well as others, happy.
- Remember we all have a right to our feelings. Handling emotions in a safe and responsible manner makes the world a safer place for all concerned. This usually takes much training, practice, and patience. Our family members may be struggling with their emotions also. The holidays are a great time to practice tolerance.
- Try to maintain a sense of humor.
- Be appreciative of others' efforts at social gatherings. Quiet expressions of sincere appreciation are usually very welcome.
- Make a gratitude list daily: it is important to reflect on what is good and right in our world, and it is also important to remind ourselves of what is good and right about what we, ourselves, are doing.
- Remember to compliment yourself for being patient, tolerant, and flexible.
- Remember life is short: even the most difficult people will only be with us for a short time.
- Consider writing a letter to at least one person who has touched your life in a significant way during the past year. Not only does this give the person the amazing gift of knowing how they touched you, but it can also benefit you by reinforcing your relationship to an important source of support, and reminding yourself how far you have come in your recovery.
- Plan self-care time to regenerate, relax, and refocus on your recovery. This may be taking a walk, going to the movies, listening to music, calling a friend in recovery, meditating, or anything else that gives you time out to recharge.
- Go to 12-Step meetings, read the literature, and work the Steps with a sponsor or buddy. Others' experience, strength, and hope can transform and strengthen our own recovery.
- Make a self-soothing or self-care plan and stick to it.
- Remember to breathe!

When we were mired in the depths of our eating disorder we may have felt as though we were alone in our misery. As we began to walk the path of recovery we found that there were many others who understood what we were going through and were more than willing to lend whatever support they could to help us recover. During the holiday season we make an extra effort to connect with members of our support network.

Keep in mind the holidays are a season, not a lifetime. Normalcy will eventually resume.

We hope you take this opportunity to celebrate the holidays, and also your life in recovery.

**Remember that it is only you that remains responsible for your health and recovery, not family, friends, partners, or sponsors.**

**For more information please see "Recovery Tools" and "Additional Suggestions for Recovery" under the Literature tab at [www.4EDA.org](http://www.4EDA.org).**

## *Helpful Hints for the Holidays*



For more information please visit our website at:

[www.4EDA.org](http://www.4EDA.org)

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