

Handling Eating Challenges During the Holidays



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12 tips to help maintain eating disorder recovery

FAMILY FEATURES

Navigating recovery from an eating disorder is rarely easy, and the holiday season tends to be especially challenging. Family gatherings, disrupted routines, food-centered celebrations and more create an abundance of potentially triggering situations for people recovering from eating disorders.

You may find it beneficial to create a holiday-specific relapse prevention plan. The goal should not be to plan or control every aspect of the holidays or get through them without slip-ups. Rather, the goal should be entering the holiday season with a plan to help you avoid triggers, forgive and grow from slip-ups and embrace flexibility when things don't go as expected.

To help avoid relapse while navigating the holiday season, consider these tips from the experts at Alsana, a national eating recovery community that serves adult clients of all genders through in-person and virtual programs:

- 1. Know your relapse triggers.** Triggers are stimuli that create intense, uncomfortable or even intolerable emotions. These triggers can send you into a reactive state, making you vulnerable to compulsive behaviors or old coping mechanisms you used to rely upon for escape or distraction. If there are certain situations or topics you find difficult, be aware of them and have a plan to address or avoid them as needed.
- 2. Keep appointments with your care team.** Because the holiday season is so busy, it can be tempting to put a pause on your recovery, but experts agree that's not ideal. Keep meeting with your dietitian and attending therapy as usual. Even if you're going home for the holidays, make it a priority to meet with your care team via phone or video chat.
- 3. Communicate with members of your support network.** Let your close friends or family members know the season may be

difficult for you. Talk with them about any specific concerns you have regarding meals, routines, family or situations that may trigger you, and remind them how much you appreciate and rely on their encouragement and support. If you need additional reinforcements, Alsana offers free online support groups.

- 4. Set clear boundaries.** Your loved ones can't read your mind. Make sure you communicate with loved ones about what's helpful, what's OK and what's not OK as you work to maintain your recovery. They may not get it right the first time around, but if you continue to self-advocate, your boundaries will become clear in time.
- 5. Practice stress management.** Because even fun can be stressful, it's nearly impossible to avoid holiday stress altogether, so make time for proactive stress management. Getting plenty of rest, spending time outdoors and taking time simply to pause can go a long way toward reducing stress and making triggers more manageable this holiday season.
- 6. Develop an exit strategy.** Rehearse what you'll say to duck out of a party or holiday gathering a bit early if you feel it's necessary. Make sure your recovery is your priority, even if that means leaving your holiday dinner early or not participating in certain activities. Your loved ones will understand your need to protect your health.
- 7. Don't forget to delegate.** If you're the one who typically hosts the family holiday gathering but don't feel up to doing so this year, ask someone else to take it on. Or, if hosting is something you truly enjoy, find ways to share the responsibility, such as selecting a co-host or planning a potluck menu.
- 8. Practice gratitude.** Gratitude can actually make you happier. In other words, your attitude can influence your outlook. Spend some time contemplating the things in life you're thankful for every

day. Creating this positive frame of mind can help you feel better prepared to tackle the challenges the holidays can bring.

- 9. Follow your meal plan.** Try not to deviate from your normal eating habits. For example, don't skip breakfast because you plan on having a big holiday lunch. You've gained valuable lessons in treatment, so even if you're feeling overwhelmed by all the hustle and bustle, try to stick to what you know but give yourself some flexibility.
- 10. Check in with your hunger and fullness cues.** Understand reminders of your hunger cues – stomach rumbling or growling, feeling light-headed, having trouble focusing on tasks, head or stomach hurting – and reminders of fullness cues, such as pressure or discomfort in your stomach, sluggishness and no longer enjoying your food. These reminders are especially important when you're at a holiday party to help you eat when you are hungry and stop when you are feeling satisfied or full. Eat mindfully but give yourself unconditional permission to have an extra taste or two of your favorite holiday foods without fear of derailing your recovery.
- 11. Don't play the shame game.** Shame tends to spiral and it only makes things harder. Recovery is not linear, so try not to look at slip-ups as deviations from your path, but rather vital opportunities to grow in your recovery.
- 12. Enjoy the holidays.** Holidays can stir up emotions, memories and family dynamics. Give yourself permission to opt in or out of festivities as needed. While it may be tempting to fall into people-pleasing behaviors or other old habits during the holiday season, consider instead starting your own recovery-minded traditions.

Find more advice to help navigate your eating disorder recovery this holiday season at [Alsana.com](https://www.alsana.com).



Stress Management Tools for the Holidays

The holiday season can be full of joy and family fun, but for some, especially those in eating disorder recovery, the occasion can be incredibly stressful. Consider these tips from the experts at Alsana to help you respond to stressors more thoughtfully and constructively:

- 1. Calm down with mindfulness practices,** meditation or yoga.
- 2. Feel and vent your feelings through journaling,** therapy and talks with loved ones.
- 3. Practice gratitude every day and be patient with yourself.**
- 4. Create a go-to playlist to use when things feel overwhelming.**
- 5. Develop a schedule that creates space for self-care.**