

## Tips on surviving the holidays (maintaining recovery)

### For people in recovery:

**Work with your therapist and treatment team to have a plan in advance of the holidays.** This can make you feel more prepared and cut down on anxiety.

**Make the holiday about relationships and celebration.** Focus on reconnecting with family and friends. Find a quiet space to catch up with someone whom you haven't seen in months. Share a favorite memory with them and let them know how much they mean to you.

**Know your boundaries and set them up.** Tell people ahead of time comments about your appearance or eating disorder aren't helpful.

**Avoid comparing yourself with others.** Whether it's about appearance or a life milestone, it's not productive to measure yourself against someone else.

**When you do sit down to eat, try to let yourself enjoy food.** Give yourself permission to eat your favorite relative's specialty dish. Remember there's not "good" or "bad" food, just food, all of which can be enjoyed in moderation. But if you overeat, it's OK.

**When you eat, be mindful.** Savor each bite and pay attention to the texture, taste, and smell. Think about the love that went into preparing the dish.

**Have a list of coping skills ready and use them.** Most people have a relative who rubs them the wrong way or says insensitive things. If their comments get to be too much, excuse yourself and call a friend, take a walk, or write in a journal.

**Be kind to yourself.** It's OK if you have a plan and can't stick with it exactly.

**Keep your own schedule.** If you work best with a routine, stick to it even if you're not at home. If you need things to be more flexible, go with the flow.

**Don't overbook yourself.** You're not obligated to attend every holiday function to which you're invited. Go only to the events you're really excited about. Keeping a lighter calendar will reduce your stress levels, too.

**Set a goal that has nothing to do with food.** You could collect winter apparel for a local homeless shelter or toys for needy children. This can bolster your self-esteem, involve the whole family, and help others all at once.

**Have fun.** It can be hard to put aside thoughts about eating disorders, but take time to enjoy yourself. Play a game. Try something new. Give back to those less fortunate.

**Put yourself first.** If you think attending a family gathering will be counterproductive to your recovery, don't go. It's OK to practice self-care.

**Reward yourself.** At the end of the holiday, find a way to reward yourself for surviving, whether it's by taking a hot bath, buying a new book, or seeing the latest movie.

## **For friends and family:**

**Remember that your loved one isn't their eating disorder.** They have interests, hobbies, and talents that have nothing to do with their illness. Ask about those activities instead of focusing solely on the eating disorder.

**Don't comment on anyone's appearance.** If you tell someone in recovery "you look healthy," they may interpret that as "you look fat." Don't take the risk. Instead tell them how happy you are to see them.

**Be flexible.** Realize that rituals centered about large amounts of food can be difficult for people with eating disorders. Start new traditions where the focus is on spending time with each other rather than sitting around a table eating. Play a board game. Do a family craft. Sing songs. There are many ways to bond and strengthen family ties that don't revolve so much around food.

**Be patient.** Just because someone has gone through treatment doesn't mean they are now recovered from their eating disorder. It can take months and even years to fully recover. Let them take it at their own pace. If you feel frustrated, practice self-care and your own coping skills.

**Ask what would be most helpful.** Let your loved one know you want to be supportive and ask what they need most from you. Maybe your loved one needs you to run interference with a relative who won't stop talking about her weight. Maybe you can take a walk with them when the gathering becomes overwhelming.

**Let them know you care and want to help.** Whether during the holidays or at other times of the year, people with eating disorders have a tendency to isolate themselves. Let them know in a nonjudgmental way that you're available if they want company.

Posted on [www.latashasmithlcsw.com](http://www.latashasmithlcsw.com)

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