

21 Tips for Getting Through the Holidays Abstinently
Originated in an OA Workshop in Port Chester, NY in 1997
(Updated over the years)

1. Focus on the true meaning of the holiday or event rather than the food orgy that sometimes accompanies it.
2. Don't set yourself up to feel bad because of unrealistic expectations of what the holiday will bring. Sometimes we're with family, sometimes with friends, sometimes we are alone. Face the reality of the situation beforehand. For example, if a family occasion almost always turns unpleasant, plan not to be part of the unpleasantness. If you're going to be alone, face that you may face sadness. Plan to deal with it, without excess food.
3. Build up your recovery bank account before and during the holidays by attending lots of meetings, working extra hard on your 12-steps and using all the tools, especially service. Keep in constant contact with your sponsor. The disease doesn't take holidays. Nor should our recovery.
4. Keep your phone and OA phone numbers with you at all times. Use them... Send texts! Make calls!
5. Know the limits of your recovery. When in doubt, avoid persons, places and things that have in the past triggered overeating. The party is not worth it. Choose not to attend if you feel it may be a major problem. Remember that abstinence, one day at a time, has to be the highest priority in your life. Without it, all other things suffer.
6. From the perspective of food, treat the holiday like any other day; our disease never takes a holiday. (For example, some say that Thanksgiving is just another Thursday!)
7. Plan something special for yourself when other people are eating sugary desserts that you choose not to include in your food plan. Special teas, fruit, something you enjoy that's abstinent for you.
8. Whether a holiday gathering or ordinary party, choose to focus on the people rather than the food. Pick out people and engage them in 'real' conversation. If they don't want to play, go to the next one. People like to talk about themselves. Ask them about themselves, their life, and their work - and really listen.
9. Try to really connect with people at the holiday table. Make food a secondary thing.
10. At Halloween or other holidays, there is no law that says you have to give out sweets. We're not doing anyone a favor by giving them junk food. Give nutritious things or money. Do not give out things you would not consume yourself. Then

there's no problem with leftovers.

11. Set an extra place beside you (in your mind or for real) at the table for your Higher Power.

12. Remember step two. It says that with the help of a Higher Power we can be restored to sane eating behavior. Call on your Higher Power. HP can keep you sane, one day at a time, one meal at a time.

13. During the holidays get out of yourself by giving service, any service, whether it's to OA, program people, to needy individuals, or to the community. Host a holiday OA meeting on Zoom. Help a neighbor. Do something that's a little hard for you, but that you know you will feel good about later. Give yourself something to respect yourself for.

14. Plan! Plan! Plan! Be proactive toward the holidays and the meals. Don't just lie back and hope for the best. Rehearse in your mind over and over exactly what you will do, particularly what, where and when you will eat. Pray just before sitting down to the meal. Arrange to text an OA friend before and after the meal.

15. Just before sitting down to eat, or just before being served, go to a private room somewhere in the house or restaurant, call/text your sponsor, and commit what you're about to eat, as well as what you will choose not to eat. It makes no difference whether you get your sponsor or voice mail. It's your commitment.

16. If you're visiting others for a holiday dinner, it's up to you to know what's being served and whether it's something that you choose to eat. Call the host. Plan accordingly. People generally understand others' food limitations. Even people without our disease have foods they don't eat for one reason or another. Volunteer to bring something that's good for you. The host thinks you're gracious and you're taking of yourself!

17. Remember that you're responsible for what you eat. It's easy when sitting with family to slip into old childish roles where you feel you must eat whatever you're given. It's not true. We are adults and responsible for our own choices. It's up to us to take care of ourselves. It's up to us to set whatever parameters or boundaries we need to set with our families.

18. Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude. There is nothing as good for staying abstinent - particularly during the Thanksgiving season - than focusing on the many things we have, rather than what we don't have. Do gratitude lists frequently.

19. How about writing a little card/note to each person who will be at the Thanksgiving dinner table telling him or her why you're grateful to know them? Leave it at their dinner place. The focus will quickly get to the real meaning of Thanksgiving rather than on the food.

20. For many of us the most dangerous period for our abstinence is after we have successfully gone through a difficult occasion. The insanity of our disease subconsciously or consciously tells us to reward ourselves with food because we did so well yesterday. Or, we suffer some kind of letdown about the occasion. It didn't meet our expectations. Some of us feel an emptiness after holidays that in the past we have tried to fill with food. For these reasons, plan to go to meetings the next day after the holiday.

21. A holiday is not a crisis. Holidays come every year. They are merely calendar times set aside to honor certain things. We deal with the holidays just like we deal with the rest of the days in the year. You can do it. Relax and work your program the way you know how. And remember to take it one day at a time.

22. As always, ask your Higher Power for help and guidance. We (try to) rely on infinite God rather than our finite selves.