

21 Tips for Getting Through the Holidays Abstinently

OA Workshop - October 29, 1997 - Port Chester, NY

Summary of Member Suggestions

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 OA phone numbers with you at all times. Use them.
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.
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, hot water and lemon, fruit, anything that's a little special 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, their work - and really listen.
9. Try to really connect with people at the holiday table. Make food a secondary thing.
10. At Halloween there is no law that says you have to give out candy. We're not doing these kids 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 Program, to needy individuals, or to the community. Do something that may be 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 lay 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.
15. Just before sitting down to eat, or just before being served, go to a private room somewhere in the house or restaurant, call your sponsor, and commit what you are about to eat, as well as what you will choose not to eat. It makes no difference whether you get your sponsor or an answering machine. It's your commitment.
16. If you're visiting others for a holiday dinner, it's up to you to know what is being served and whether it is something that you choose to eat. Call the host. Plan accordingly. People 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 are 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 them 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 simply 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.