

Twelve Ideas to Help People with Eating Disorders Negotiate the Holidays



Courtesy of: Center for Change / Compiled by: Michael E. Berrett, PhD

National Eating Disorders Association

1. Eat regularly and in some kind of reasonable pattern. Avoid preparing for the last supper. Don't skip meals and starve in an attempt to make up for what you recently ate or are about to eat. Keep a regular and moderate pattern.
2. Worry more about the size of your heart than the size of your hips! It is the holiday season, a great time to reflect, enjoy relationships with loved ones, and most importantly, a time to feel gratitude for blessings received and to give back through loving service to others.
3. Discuss your anticipation of the holidays with your therapist, physician, dietitian, or other members of your treatment team so that they can help you predict, prepare for, and get through any uncomfortable family interactions without self-destructive coping attempts.
4. Have a well-thought-out game plan before you go home or invite others into your home. Know "where the exits are," where your support people are, and how you'll recognize when it's time to make a quick exit and get connected with needed support.
5. Talk with loved ones about important issues: decisions, victories, challenges, fears, concerns, dreams, goals, special moments, spirituality, relationships and your feelings about them. Allow important themes to be present. Allow yourself to have fun rather than rigidly focusing on food or body concerns.
6. Think of someone to call if you are struggling with addictive behaviors, or with negative thoughts or difficult emotions. Alert them ahead of time; let them know of your concerns, needs, and the possibility of you calling them for emotional support.
7. Consider choosing one loved one to be your reality check with food, to either help fix a plate for you or to give you sound feedback on the food portion sizes you make for yourself.

8. Write down your vision of where you would like your mind and heart to be during this holiday time with loved ones. Take time, several times per day, to find a quiet place to get in tune with your vision, to remember, to nurture, and to center yourself in the thoughts, feelings, and actions that match your vision for yourself.
9. Focus your personal goals for your time with loved ones during the holidays. Make them about doing something rather than about trying to prevent something. It's fine to have food goals, but make sure you add personal, emotional, spiritual, and relationship goals as well.
10. Work on being flexible in your thoughts. Learn to be flexible when setting guidelines for yourself and expectations of yourself and others. Strive to be flexible in what you can eat during the holidays. Take a holiday from self-imposed criticism, rigidity, and perfectionism.
11. Stay active in your support group, or join one if you are not currently involved. Many support groups can be helpful: 12-step groups, co-dependency groups, eating disorder therapy groups, book clubs, neighborhood game groups, and religious- or spiritually oriented groups are examples of groups that may give real support. Isolation and withdrawal from positive support are not the way to get through trying times.
12. Avoid overstressing and overbooking yourself. A lower sense of stress can decrease the perceived need to turn to eating-disordered behaviors or other unhelpful coping strategies. Cut down on unnecessary events and obligations and leave time for relaxation, contemplation, reflection, spiritual renewal, simple service, and enjoying the small yet most important things in life. This will help you experience and enjoy a sense of gratitude and peace.