

Eating Disorder Recovery Coping with Holiday Season

The holiday season can be joyful, but there are many stressors and emotional triggers that can cause some struggle, particularly for those recovering from an eating disorder. The lead up to this season is a great time to take stock of your coping mechanisms and support plans.

Holidays are a wonderful time for connection, reflection, and a much needed “pause” from the day to day routine. Holidays can be a time for mixed emotions and for many individuals, whether or not they are struggling with an eating disorder, the holidays can bring up intense emotions and painful thoughts. Those struggling with an eating disorder face further obstacles and challenges with festivities being based around food events. The key to thriving through the holidays is all in the **planning ahead**.

Support People including Treatment Team

- Find allies you feel comfortable with
- Let a trusted person or people know how you're feeling.
- Tell them ways they can support you leading up to an event, and on the day itself

Utilize your treatment team to create a holiday meal plan to help you navigate the holidays. Work on foods you would like to try, challenge foods if you feel ready, and more comfortable foods if you are feeling unsure about your ability to not engage in behaviors.

Having a plan to work from can help reduce anxiety about meals and gatherings. Before the holidays, set up a check-in session with your therapist or treatment team to be able to talk with a safe and objective person. If you are out-of-town for the holidays you can set up a phone session as well. It is also imperative that you schedule a follow-up visit immediately after the holidays to be able to check-in as well.



Who can I call?

EDQ does not provide a crisis counselling service. If you're feeling distressed and need help now, contact these 24 hour services:



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1800 33 4673



13 11 14



1300 642 255



1300 659 467

Dealing with thoughts/the inner critic

Practice self-compassion and gentleness when things don't go according to plan.

Try replacing the inner critic's messages with affirmations, for example:

'I have chosen to live for me today'

'I am important'

'It's okay to take baby steps'

The holidays can be hectic and your mindset, mood and anxiety will likely shift constantly, and so perhaps you will eat more than you had planned for or you won't be able to challenge yourself as much as you had hoped you could.

Do your best to have understanding and compassion for yourself, reminding yourself of how stressful the holidays can be and how you are truly doing your best, and how things not going according to plan is often the rule, not the exception. If anxiety is very high, this might be a good time to reach out to your support person if you have one or to practice some of your coping strategies.



TIPS FOR HOLIDAY SEASON

Mindful Eating and Food

The 3 S's—stress, social eating, and schedule overload— create the perfect storm that leads to overeating or struggling with food choices. These make mindful eating more difficult and require being even more attentive to your hunger, stress triggers, and social commitments.

Make eating regular meals and snacks a priority. You'll feel better able to deal with and enjoy celebratory activities if you're well nourished (we know this is hard, but it helps a lot!)

Avoid the temptation to skip meals or restrict prior to a special event. It may make you feel irritable and anxious.

Remember that it's normal to eat differently at this time of year. Food is social and celebratory as well as being nourishing for our bodies.



Self Care including Boundaries

While self-care is critical, fitting it in to an already packed day can feel stressful. It can be helpful to name their top one to three self-care priorities, which often includes some form of stillness—perhaps journaling, a bath, or time with nature or in meditation. When lots of things are going on, focussing on being still can help you to recognise what you need from a situation.

Practice saying no- affirm that you have choices. Be honest about who is helpful for your recovery and who makes it harder. Gravitate toward those who are grateful and happy to see you, and away from the people who are likely to upset you.

Set time limits - only stay as long as you want. You don't have to stay the full length of an event!

Set your own boundaries before going to family events- decide what topics to talk about and what topics are no go zones. Let other people know what these boundaries are if you think it is likely that they will be crossed. Ensure you enforce these boundaries throughout the event/day.

Write down and practice conversations that may arise. If you're worried about people commenting on what you've got on your plate, write down a few responses and practice them with a friend beforehand.

"I'd rather not talk about it right now"

"I'm doing my best at a hard time;
please be gentle with me"

Change the subject or leave the
conversation

"Can we talk about something else?"

"I support you, but I don't need to
hear about your diet."

"I'm in recovery from an eating
disorder. Please don't talk about
diets (or carb counting, or food
policing) with me."

"I don't talk about diets or weight loss."

"I've been working really hard at accepting my body,
and this feels like a setback. Let's talk about
something else."

Soothing and Grounding Yourself

When you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed before and during the holidays, focusing on taking slowed, deep breaths can help calm and ground your body and your racing mind. You could use the breathing exercise described below, find another one you prefer, or ask your therapist if they may be able to suggest one for you. There are many variations. Try doing it, whether alone or with others if it feels possible, when you notice yourself feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or at any time when you feel that an exercise to calm your system would be beneficial. After you do it and feel more calm, this could also be a good time to read or recite one of your favourite quotes to yourself.

Sit in a quiet, comfortable place where you can spend a few undisturbed minutes. Close your eyes, settle yourself into a comfortable sitting position, and pay attention to your breathing. Notice that you are paying attention to your life force. Count how long it takes you to inhale, and then try to extend your exhale two counts longer. For example, if you count to six while inhaling, you would count to eight while exhaling. Do this for a few minutes. If you get distracted and lose count don't worry, this is so normal. Just resume each time as best as you can.

If you are around others but are still able to focus on your breath, you could still do the counting in and out while standing or walking if this feels possible, and without closing your eyes. You could also just focus on taking slower breaths without counting.

Anti-Anxiety Breathing, taken from the 8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder Workbook by Carolyn Costin and Gwen Schubert Grabb

My happiness does not depend on my weight or size, but on who I am and what I do.

I am a survivor and I am a warrior. I don't need my eating disorder to be good enough.

I am courageous and from today I will stand up for myself.

I will not define myself by my past.

How I feel about myself has nothing to do with what I eat or don't eat.

I deserve to be happy and I deserve to fulfill my dreams.

I deserve to treat my body with respect.

I will love and appreciate myself.

I don't need to do excessive exercising to deserve food.

Everyday I become stronger and healthier.

Example Affirmations by Miriam Roelink, RecoveryWarriors.com