

Holiday Survival Guide

This time of year we see advertisements of snowy streets and families coming together, laughing. Presents being handed back and forth, faces of pure delight as each person gets exactly what they really wanted. We also see families greeting each other with joy and true happiness and friends embracing with love and gratefulness. We also see ads with folks frantically running around trying to get that last minute gift but realizing that if they just have a cup of coffee, a piece of candy, use this particular store, use this particular website that everything will be okay and they can just sit back and enjoy the season.

While this may be true for some of us or parts of it may true for most of us and none of it may be true for a few of us, the holidays bring a variety stressors that exceed most of our skills.

This packet is designed to help create a plan for general survival and some special planning to get through really tricky situations. You can survive the holidays and hopefully enjoy some parts.

Regardless of your family, your celebrations or your past holiday experiences with some planning this season can be manageable and maybe even enjoyable.

Holiday Essentials

Plan * Plan * Plan * Plan * Plan * Plan * Plan * Plan

I can't say it enough. You need a plan.

Getting through the holidays requires that you have a plan. Knowing where you will be, what you can anticipate and predicting how you might react. Pretending that things will be 'different' this holiday or believing that somehow you will have a new experience with all the same old people doing all the same old things will get you what it's always got you. (12 step reference)

You must have a plan, and then you need at least one 'in case' plan. While it may not be spontaneous and you may find yourself feeling frustrated that 'no one else' has to do this, this is how people get through this time of year successfully.

Plans can include finding 30 minutes to sit quietly, having snacks with you, taking a nap, taking a walk. Having a plan will help you manage your energy through the day so that you can schedule breaks and time to decompress.

Stay in the present

This time of year seems to inspire nostalgia, walks down memory lane and reminiscing. Don't do it. Stay in the present moment. Try not to get lost in the past or revisit 'should haves' or 'if only's'. Bringing your grown up self to the holidays can make a huge difference. It's very common for people to slip into old family patterns and to regress into a younger emotional self which can lead to feelings of being powerless and out of control. Staying in the present can help you recall skills and remind you that you have more control over your life than you did as a child. Sometimes this knowledge can get you through a very challenging moment.

Holidays don't last forever

The holidays will pass. You just have to get to New Year's Day. Even though your whole life might not be perfect it will fall back into its regular patterns and you can get back to routines that help you stay centered and focused.

Make a New Holiday Tradition

Sometimes the best way to assert yourself is to make a new tradition. This will be something just for you. You may invite others to join you or do this on your own. Create something new and special that you might like to have as a new tradition this season. You could try donating time, lighting candles, singing a new song, visiting a new place, whatever it may be, spend some time trying to think of something that you'd like to do this year that has special meaning for you.

Some Ideas for new traditions:

Don't:

Forget to breathe.

Drink too much.

Get too heavily into it.

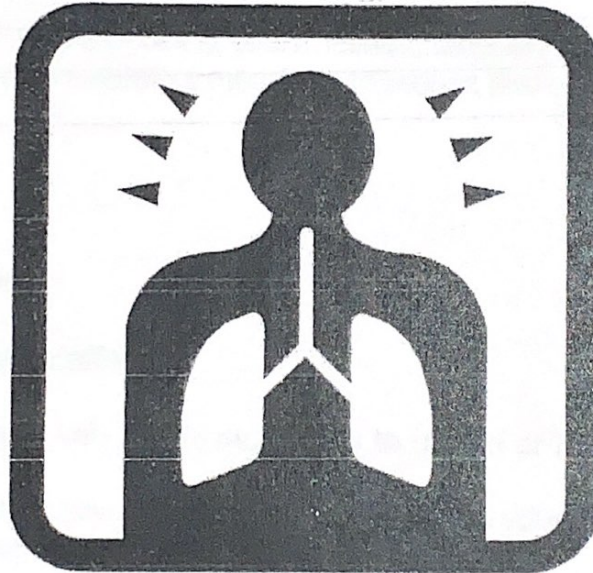
Over schedule your time to train.

Make any major decisions over the holidays. Wait until the second week of January.

Square Breathing

Do this skill mindfully with full awareness, focusing only on your breathing. If you notice your mind wandering, just notice and bring yourself back to your breathing. By taking these long, slow, deep breaths, you will get more air into your lungs which will get more air to your muscles which will reduce tension and more air to your brain so you can think a little bit more clearly.

1. Breathe in while counting to **4**.
2. Hold your breath while counting to **4**.
3. Exhale while counting to **4**.
4. Repeat **4** times.



Try "Square Breathing" at least **4** times a day. More often if it is useful.

Holiday Do's and Don't's

DO:

Stay on your regular sleep schedule as best you can.

Eat every few hours, regardless.

Drink 8 ounces of water, as least four glasses per day.

Get fresh air, take walks or just go outside for 10 minutes every so often.

Practice mindfulness at least five times a day.

Notice when you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed or overly anxious, take preventative measures to reduce these feelings as best you can.

Don't:

Forget to breath.

Drink too much caffeine.

Get too hungry, you will be more likely to restrict or binge.

Over schedule yourself, prioritize and try to give yourself appropriate time to transition from one thing to another.

Get lost in expectations and 'should be's' and focus on what really is.

Make any major decisions over the holidays. Wait until the second week of January.

Ignore

You can practice being non-judgmental with yourself and others on a daily basis, You can't stop others from judging You. However, You can "Ignore" their judgments. You don't have to let these judgments have any impact on you. Also, You can be non-judgmental with those who are judgmental of you, even when it is hard and challenging.

Ways I can "Ignore" the judgments of others: _____

Ways I can be non-judgmental with others when they are judging me: _____

The Most Difficult

This skill is about dealing with the "Most Difficult" people and relationships. Even when things are challenging and people are hard to deal with, it may be in your best interest to figure out how to deal with them effectively.

Rate the level of difficulty (0-20)

Feelings about this person are:

I can minimize my judgments by:

I can keep my short-term and long-term goals in mind by:

I can engage in effective interactions with difficult people by:

Things You Can Do In An Emergency

- Write in your Journal
- Listen to your favorite music
- Repeat an Affirmation
- Remind yourself "I'm going to be ok" and "I'm doing the best I can"... this is a normal part of the recovery process
- Plant your feet firmly on the ground
- Count up 1 to 10 then back 10 to 1
- Say out loud things you see and smell
- Touch the wall, the floor and objects close to you
- Call someone on the phone
- Walk around and watch your own feet - listen to the sound
- Listen to yourself breathe - Do deep breathing
- Listen to music and count the beats
- Don't be afraid to **ask for help**
- Hug someone safe
- Hold someone's hand (someone safe)
- Tear up paper, throw ice, chew ice chips
- Visualize the memory as an object and put it "away" (for example, the memory is a blue rubber ball and you put it in a toybox)
- Focus on details... leaves on trees, blades of grass, fibers in carpet
- Call your therapist
- Call a Hotline
- Hold and/or talk to a stuffed animal
- Fight the voices - change the negatives to positives
- Play an instrument
- Gently wash your face, hands or hair
- Do gardening, shovel snow or mow the lawn
- Color in a coloring book
- Rock in a rocking chair
- Touch a familiar object that you carry with you (keys, a necklace) or listen to your watch ticking
- Hold and pet your cat or dog
- Make a list of things to do or shopping list
- Write down who and where you are
- Pray, talk yourself down or yell
- Say what you feel out loud, even if you have to yell or cry!
- Change your environment... walk out of the room, touch something different, change the sounds around you (put on music, turn on the tv, etc.), eat something different and "safe", smell something different (perfume, flowers, food, grass, etc.)
- Visualize a stop sign

- Dance to music
- Say out loud "I am here right now"... assure yourself that this is a normal process for you
- Do self-affirmation... read books, listen to tapes and write down good things about yourself
- Identify your triggers (things that make you feel badly or have bad memories or flashbacks)

15 Ways to Deal with the Holiday Season

Feeling pressured to eat more or eat less is never a comfortable situation. How can you deal with the stress and anxiety of a similar situation during the holiday season? The following tips may benefit you:

1. **Plan ahead.** If you plan on visiting with friends and family, plan out the situation ahead of time in order to avoid extra stress and anxiety. You may also consider telling your family ahead of time not to make remarks about your eating disorder.
2. **Eat regularly.** Despite the fact that many people eat excessively or eat a large amount of snacks during the holidays, try and stick to a normal routine.
3. **Make a list.** Write down each thing you need to get done for the holiday season. Getting things done ahead of time and having a list so you do not forget anything can save you a lot of unneeded stress.
4. **Talk with your therapist.** A therapist can work with you on coping methods and address specific worries or anxiety you may have.
5. **Find a support partner.** This person will be there for you to talk with if thoughts regarding your eating disorder begin to enter your mind or you feel overwhelmed.
6. **Determine your reactions ahead of time.** If someone makes an awkward remark about your eating habits or weight, know what you plan to say ahead of time. This may help relieve anxiety during holiday events.
7. **Offer to bring a dish.** If you are unsure of what may be offered on the holiday menu, offer to bring something you know you will be willing to eat.
8. **Be flexible.** While this may be difficult, being flexible with plans and situations which may arise can relieve tension that may come with the holiday season. This may also prevent emotional eating.
9. **Take part in fun activities.** By taking part in fun activities, you can distract yourself from any food worries you may be having.
10. **Confide in someone.** Tell someone who will be with you during meal times your specific concerns and allow them to give you advice on what is appropriate.
11. **Only attend what you can handle.** Politely decline invitations if you feel the situation would make you uncomfortable or overwhelmed. Situations which include non-food activities may be most enjoyable.
12. **Eat healthy foods.** If you stick to a regular meal plan and eat healthy food then you reduce the risk of feeling "guilty" over eating.

13. **Attend a support group.** Attend events and make friends with other members, this type of fellowship will provide you with support and encouragement.
14. **Don't focus on mistakes.** If you feel too full or have experienced a binge, move on and do not allow it to stress you out.
15. **Set goals.** Instead of only focusing on food and weight during the holiday season, set other goals regarding what you might like to talk about and focus on.