

# Holidays

## Holidays can threaten your recovery

For people in recovery from alcoholism or drug addiction, holidays can be a threat to sobriety. In fact, the pressure of forced celebrations and family reunions can send any of us into mood swings.

Flip on the television during December and you're likely to view scene after scene of families enjoying gentle conversation and a warm fire while they gather around a glittering tree. Before you got into recovery, you may have measured your family's experiences against that holiday ideal and constantly found them wanting. This may have left you with a sense of loss and grief, which can lead to self-medicating with alcohol or other drugs.

Now that you are in recovery, you'll still experience tension with your family. However, instead of lapsing back into old habits, try to use the holiday season as a time to renew your Twelve Step program and practice new tools for managing conflict. Two of these tools are awareness and planning—principles that help you let go of unrealistic expectations, acknowledge spiritual traditions, and identify safe holiday customs. The following suggestions underlie these principles:

### What are some strategies that can help you safely celebrate?

#### *Seek sober fellowship*

In order to protect your recovery, plan to connect with your AA sponsor or a sober friend during the holidays. Also, consider starting a new holiday tradition by throwing an alcohol-free party for friends or attending a special AA holiday event. During holidays some recovering people find it tempting to let their program slide. It can pay to do just the opposite by giving more attention to the Twelve Steps and attending extra meetings.

#### *Bring your own nonalcoholic beverages*

You might feel awkward arriving at a party where alcoholic drinks dominate the beverage selection. Prevent this dilemma by bringing your own nonalcoholic drinks. It's not recommended, however, to show up with nonalcoholic beer or wine. The drinking ritual paired with the smell and taste of alcohol can trigger a desire to drink.

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Responsible party hosts will recognize that holiday celebrations don't have to center on alcoholic drinks and that good cheer can be achieved by offering a range of attractive nonalcoholic beverages.

### ***Take holidays one day at a time***

Most holidays officially last only twenty-four hours. If the thought of abstaining from alcohol or other drugs for the whole holiday season seems unbearable, take it one day at a time.

### ***Reconsider family gatherings***

People in early recovery might do well to opt out of family gatherings, especially when they center on drinking. Another option is to attend but take periodic breaks to call a sponsor or sober friend. Plan to drive your own car so you can leave at any time you choose. Don't feel guilty if you need to leave a celebration early. Make your recovery your priority.

Resentment has been described as allowing a person you dislike to live in your head, rent-free. The people we resent tend to dominate our thinking and feeling—a fact that does nothing to resolve our conflicts with them.

Resentments that gain steam during the holidays can be disastrous for anyone, especially recovering people. The book *Alcoholics Anonymous* refers to resentment as the number one offender, the most common factor in failed sobriety. When we notice our own resentments, we need to remind ourselves of their power and talk to a recovery friend about coping with them.

### ***Return the holidays to a spiritual base***

Drinking and drugging are powerful experiences because they deliver a counterfeit spirituality. Using chemicals can create the illusion of self-transcendence and intimacy with others. However, we can taste the real thing by reminding ourselves of the spiritual basis of many holidays. Most religious traditions stress the power of unselfish giving, and this is a spiritual practice that all of us can cherish during the holidays.

### ***Find new ways to have sober fun***

As part of your recovery, find ways to have fun without putting yourself in situations where you will be tempted to drink or use. There are many ways to have fun without your addictive substance. It just takes a concerted effort to find sober activities you enjoy and to take the time to get involved in those activities.

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***Make a point of giving recovery gifts at holiday time***

One way to reinforce your sobriety is to make a point to share gifts that have a recovery theme with friends you have met in the program. This helps focus the holiday on recovery success, and it's a great way to pass on the message of the Twelve Steps.

**Recovery Action Step**

Write out a plan of how you are going to handle any upcoming holidays. Review this plan as the holidays approach and then put the plan into action. Don't forget to celebrate your success in fun, sober ways. Ask others for help if needed.