

Guide to Staying Sober During the Holidays

If you are new to recovery, whether you're an alcoholic, family member, or loved one you may not realize that the holidays present some unique challenges to remaining sober. You can think of the holidays as comprised of the components needed to make up a perfect storm. Whether or not that storm materializes depends a lot on the steps that you take to guard against relapse.

First, you need to know what the factors are that lead relapse. If you ever attended treatment for alcoholism you hopefully learned these, but many alcoholics stop drinking without attending rehab, family members sometimes never get this information and even if you did attend treatment you may not remember some of these factors. The things that lead to relapse are often the very same things that promoted (not caused) drinking in the first place. Stress, loneliness, high-risk environments, environmental cues, and diet including sugar intake often play an important role in relapse. Next, you'll want to consider the coping skills that can help with each of these factors. How, for example, can exercise and talking to yourself help you stay sober? Read on.

As much fun as the holidays can be for some people, they are also stressful for almost everyone. Stress can cause you to relapse. This shouldn't be all that surprising. Alcohol has a depressant effect. Whether or not you were aware that you used to drink when you became "stressed out" chances are that being stressed now may cause you to think about drinking.

What are the things that are stressful about the holidays? Well certainly shopping is one stressful thing about the holidays. Some of this stress can be reduced by starting early. Do your shopping before the crowds hit the stores. If you've waited too long into the season for that, try going early in the morning before other people get out there. You may also want to try shopping online there are never any crowds or full parking lots or pushy sales people to contend with. Shopping online may not be risk free, but if you shop wisely on sites that are certified safe from hackers and guarantee secure connections you can reduce the risk down to about what it would be shopping with a credit card at the store.

For some of us time spent with extended family is stressful. If you find going to visit family stressful you may want to limit the time of your visit. You can also plan activities like movies that the family can do together, but which limit the interaction.

Some stress during the holidays is inevitable, but how you deal with it isn't. Make sure that you are getting adequate amounts of sleep. When you are well rested, stress is easier to deal with and the little things don't bother you as much. Exercise can be a great method for improving your ability to cope with stress. When you exercise, your body produces endorphins which are the body's natural chemicals for helping you feel better. If you don't have a regular exercise routine you'll want to start out slow, but as little as 30

minutes of exercise a day can make a big difference. If you have a health condition, you should consult your physician before starting to exercise.

For any number of reasons you might be alone and or lonely during the holidays. Perhaps you are new to recovery and your old friends were your drinking friends who you no longer hang out with because their drinking puts you at risk. Maybe you can't get home for the holidays or you don't have family. Being alone can put your recovery in danger for many reasons. Being alone can lead to painful feelings not only of general loneliness, but also self-pity, lower self-esteem, or fear. In the bad old days drinking helped numb these feelings. Look for extra support during the holidays. Attend more support group meetings; find a meeting that happens on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Try putting new meaning in the holidays by serving others. Lots of organizations need extra help during the holidays and would love to have you volunteer.

Believe it or not what you eat can have a bearing on how easy or difficult you find it to stay sober during the holidays and year round. It seems like sugary sweets are a staple of the holiday season. Office mates around the country ply each other with their home baked sweets; pies and candy are everywhere. It sometimes seems that the period from Thanksgiving through New Years is the season to indulge. For the alcoholic this can be a real problem, because research has shown that increased sugar intake can cause cravings for alcohol. Do yourself a favor and avoid the sweets. Many people find sugar moderation difficult one bite leads to another and so on. You may find it better just to avoid sugar altogether. Research has also shown that a nutritious diet helps reduce cravings and contributes to the ability to abstain from alcohol, so eat well during the holidays.

Environmental cues play a large role in your desire to drink. Research has shown that exposure to alcohol, even though you aren't drinking it, can stimulate an increased salivary response in alcoholics. So when you sit down to dinner with the family and everyone is drinking alcohol and you aren't your body may desire alcohol even if your conscious mind has rejected it. Of course, it doesn't take being near alcohol to set off cues that make you want to drink. Common triggers might include drinking out of certain kinds of glasses, being around people who have been drinking, being in places where you used to enjoy drinking. Many of these you can guard against by choosing your surroundings, and timing where you are and when you are there. Some of them you may not be in control of and may need to employ positive self talk or limit your exposure. If your whole family drinks, but you have stopped you might choose to limit the amount of time you spend at family holiday functions. If limiting this time is not an option consider having a post event plan in place. Perhaps you stop at a meeting on your way home, or you may want to have arranged with your sponsor or a sober friend to be able to call them during and / or after the event.

You may want to consider writing a "sobriety script" to help you get through the holidays. You can recite this script during times of temptation to help you get through the situation. In creating the script you may want to write about the following.

1. What's the most important reason for abstaining? Or, What are the top 5 reasons for not drinking?
2. What are the real benefits of sobriety?
3. What do you stand to lose if you go back to drinking?
4. What are your best coping strategies for staying sober?

Your script can be any length you want. It should cover all the important points and be short enough to memorize. Practice saying it aloud or in your head, so that at the key moments you need it you'll be able to remember it. Repeat it to yourself when you are faced with a situation that causes cravings or thoughts of drinking.

Finally, if you slip during the holidays stop and take action. Don't let the situation go on. Remember some studies have found that up to 90% of people have an instance of relapse in the first 4 years of sobriety. Don't take this as an excuse to drink - strive to be in that top 10% you can do it. If you do have a drink, don't let embarrassment stop you from getting to a support group, or calling the treatment facility you went to or discussing it with a counselor. The faster you get any renewed drinking stopped the easier it will be to keep it from spiraling out of control.

We at [Alcoholism Resources](#) wish you Happy Holidays.

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