

How to Survive the Holidays If You Have an Eating Disorder

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The holidays are not relaxing and fun for everyone especially those with an eating disorder (E/D). You may dread the day when the table is completely filled and over-flowing with deliciously home cooked or catered food including the sounds of relatives and loved ones laughing and enjoying themselves. You are already obsessing about numbers, calories, fat grams or how you will appear in an outfit. You are already trying how to figure out how to cheat and sneak off to the bathroom without being noticed or convince a loved one that you have indeed finished all the food on your plate.

Feeling guilty comes naturally to someone with an E/D. You may be struggling or over-worry about seeing a relative that you don't like or have a conflict with.

Where do your thoughts go?

They go directly to the one coping skill that you feel has "saved you" or helped you get through a sticky situation in the past. Without thinking your brain starts to obsess about food or devise ways that you can act on your E/D symptoms. Manipulating food in one way or another has become a security blanket. Eating or restricting your caloric intake will temporarily take your brain off whatever is REALLY worrying you and this can give you a false sense of control or even empower you.

Here are some tips you can use to help yourself over the holidays:

- Remember to be mindful of the holiday. It is NOT a holiday to "just eat." Each holiday has a meaning and purpose.
- Make sure you eat regularly throughout the day so you don't go to the table famished or get too hungry.
- Have a "buddy" that you can check in with during the meal or help you if you begin to struggle or panic.
- Follow the meal plan your treatment team gave you.
- Downplay the "feast" type image in your head. This is just a regular meal like the rest of them. Don't make this one any different. You can NOT gain lots of weight in one day. It isn't possible. Remember to think logically.
- Allow yourself to try some new foods that you haven't tried before. Make your plate colorful by adding foods with different textures, shapes, and colors. Even if you can only try one new food it is a step in the right direction.

