

## **12 Abstinence Strategies for the Holiday Season**

Thanksgiving and Christmas are bad enough for compulsive eaters. But in between them are five weeks of office parties, boxes of holiday candy, cocktail parties, and more. OA's Steps, Tools, and Traditions are our keys to success. Here are 12 specific ideas for using them to get through the holiday season.

1. Use Step One: Remind yourself that you are powerless over food, of the pain, suffering, and unmanageability of your life when you eat compulsively. Abstinence is sweeter than any holiday confection.
2. Live One Day at a Time! Don't think about getting through the entire holiday season, instead focus on staying abstinent until you go to sleep tonight.
3. Sponsor and Be Sponsored: Turn to your sponsor for support and then check in with any sponsees to see how they are doing.
4. Make a 12th Step Within Call: December 12th is OA's 12th Step Within Day. Get out of your head by calling someone you haven't seen at a meeting lately or drop in on the 12th Step Within Day phone marathon.
5. Assess Your Abstinence: If you're worried about whether you can make it through the season, take a look at OA's Strong Abstinence Checklist for suggestions that are proven
6. Inventory Any Slips: If you do stray from your plan, use OA's Been Slipping and Sliding to learn how you can avoid a future slip.

Recovering from compulsive eating in New Hampshire and Maine, one day at a time

7. Ask Other Members for Help: If you don't have a sponsor, get one. Even if you do, ask other OA members how they cope with the holidays.
8. Don't Forget Service: At your meetings, raise your hand for any service opportunities available and do them cheerfully. Read the Promises, put away chairs, order the literature: It's a holiday gift that you'll want to keep on giving.

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- 9 Take Some Quiet Time: Whether as part of your daily spiritual activities or right before a holiday get-together, take some quiet time, relax, read some program literature, and get into a frame of mind where your Higher Power can help you.

10. Make Meetings: Don't let them slip away. If the holiday season is messing up your meeting schedule, supplement with phone meetings or online meetings. Or attend one of OA's holiday phone marathons.

11. Talk to the Newcomer: Nothing so ensures immunity from compulsive eating as working with newcomers. Greet them warmly, make them feel welcome, and give them a buzz during the week. And the most important support for abstinence during the holidays or anytime:

12. Trust and Rely on God: As powerless people, we must seek the power to abstain from a source greater than ourselves. Ask your Higher Power, however you define it, for ease and comfort, the willingness to avoid compulsive eating, and to focus your attention on how you can bring others good cheer during the season.

**Tips of Getting Through the Holidays Abstinently (Adapted from Portchester OA Workshop 10/97; Printed in Road to Recovery 12/01)**

1. Focus on the true meaning of the holiday rather than the food.
2. Keep expectations realistic... about other people, the holiday and us.
3. Build up a recovery bank account before and during the holiday by attending lots of meetings, staying in constant contact with a sponsor, working extra hard on the Steps and using all the tools especially Service.
4. Keep OA phone numbers with you at all times...and use them.
5. Know the limits of recovery. When in doubt, avoid people places and things that have triggered overeating in the past. Remember that abstinence is the MOST important thing in our lives without exception!
6. Write frequent gratitude lists focusing on what we have rather than what we have not.
7. Give service, any service, to Program or the community. Do something that may be difficult, but will make us feel good about ourselves later.
8. Prepare! Call the host ahead of time and find out what food is being served. Even people without our disease have food restrictions. Volunteer to bring something that is good for us.
9. Plan! Plan! Plan! Rehearse exactly what, where and when we will eat.
10. Plan something special when other people are eating items that we choose not to include in our food plan. Flavorful teas, hot water with lemon or anything that is a little special...as long as it is on our plan.
11. Focus on the people rather than the food. Engage in "real" conversation. Ask them about themselves, their life, and their work...and really listen.
12. Set an extra place (in our mind or real) at the table beside us for HP.
13. Remember Step Two. Pray before eating. Call on HP to help stay sane, one day at a time, and one meal at a time.
14. Just before the meal, whether in a home or restaurant, go to a private room and call your sponsor, recommitting what you will eat and what you choose not to eat.
15. Remember we are responsible for what we eat. It is easy to slip into childish roles where we feel we must eat whatever is given, but we are adults and responsible for our own choices. It is up to us to take care of and set boundaries.
16. Write a note to each person at the dinner table telling them why you are grateful to know them. Leave it at their dinner place and see the focus shift.
17. Plan to go to a meeting the day after the holiday. Often the most dangerous periods are after successfully going through a difficult occasion. The insanity of the disease subconsciously or consciously tells us to reward ourselves with food because we did so well the day before. Or, we suffer a let down because the holiday did not meet our expectations. Or, perhaps, we feel an emptiness that we use to fill with food. Stay in touch with feelings...and reach out to the program.
18. Work program. Holidays are simply calendar times set aside to honor certain things. Honor yourself and stay abstinent. We can do it!



## **IF YOU ARE THE HOST(ESS)**

1. Eat ahead of time
2. Abstinence is a choice
3. Be part of the program of attraction
4. Think outside the box—start new nonfood traditions—canoeing, outdoor games, swimming
5. Invite an OA friend
6. Make conversation starters
7. Eat healthy portions of healthy foods
8. Abstinence first; God first
9. One Day At a Time
10. Cook abstinent foods that are your favorites
11. Social time is for the pleasure of company of invitees
12. Start the day with Step 11
13. Work on relationships with family or friends before the holidays
14. H O W-- Honesty Openness Willingness
15. Take risks; do not be afraid of failure
16. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail
17. Remember HALT—don't allow yourself to get too hungry, too angry, too lonely, too tired

# IF YOU ARE A GUEST

1. Contact the hostess of a party you plan to attend
2. Eat ahead of time
3. Abstinence is a choice
4. Choose abstinence (a long term goal) vs. eating your trigger food (a short term goal)
5. Look your best and feel good about yourself: what you wear, make up, mani-pedi, hair
6. Take your own food
7. Bring an abstinent food to a party
8. Make calls before and after the party
9. Feel the feelings--anger, loss, sadness, being different, being uncomfortable
10. Work the OA steps and tools that much harder and eat abstinently
11. Be part of the program of attraction
12. Ask for the food and drink that you need
13. Load up on meetings
14. Pray for abstinence
15. A holiday is just another day to take the steps and use the tools
16. Think outside the box—start new nonfood traditions—canoeing, outdoor games, swimming
17. Take your program with you wherever you go
18. Make a call before you fall
19. Eat healthy portions of healthy foods
20. Abstinence first; God first
21. One day at a time
22. No one cares what you are eating or drinking
23. If you are hungry when it is not time to eat, wait 15 minutes
24. You only have to abstain for 24 hours
25. When traveling, contact local people and [oa.org](http://oa.org)
26. Turn your abstinence over to God every day, all day
27. Start the day with Step 11
28. Carry Just For Today card in your wallet
29. Do not show gratitude to a hostess by breaking your abstinence
30. Work on relationships with family or friends before the holidays
31. H O W-- Honesty Openness Willingness
32. Take Step 3 and say the Third Step Prayer
33. Nothing tastes as good as abstinence feels
34. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail
35. Remember HALT—don't allow yourself to get too hungry, too angry, too lonely, too tired
36. Take your reasonable portion in your first helping—no seconds
37. One day, one meal, one moment at a time
38. Thanksgiving is just Thursday
39. Inquire about the menu, explaining that you have some food restrictions
40. Remember how good it feels to wake up abstinent