

Staying SAFE and SANE Through the Holiday Season

by Barbara B. from Plainfield

Do decorating, shopping, and the presence of special foods from October to January stress you out even more than usual? Don't let the added holiday stress drive you to eat. If you carefully plan your food and activities, you can get through the October to January season abstinently and sanely! Here is what I do to make sure I maintain my serenity when the world around me is focused on food.

Now here are my tips for the holidays in chronological order.

Halloween

We all know another word for Halloween is "sugar." Sugar is probably an overeater's most dangerous drug. Biochemists can tell you what it does to you to create insatiable cravings.

Tip #1: Do not buy your favorite sugar for yourself or anyone else. Do not buy ANY sugar. Do not walk down the sugar aisles of stores. I even try to avoid reading sale circulars and advertisements for Halloween food. There is no law that says you have to give sugar to the Trick or Treaters. I often give holiday pencils, erasers, small assignment pads, stickers, or small toys like fake spiders, skeleton rings, clip-on ear rings, etc. Don't forget coins in baggies. Anything but sugar!

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a holiday celebrated with food, but you can base it on moderate amounts of abstinent food. Try and focus on the thanks you have for your Higher Power. After all, that's what we are celebrating.

Tip #2: If you are the host/hostess, cook abstinent food that YOU can eat. If you are the guest, bring something to share that is on your food plan. Call in advance and find out what the menu will be if you are invited out. Contribute something safe for you but something everyone will enjoy. Crunchy vegetable appetizers will take the edge off, especially if the meal is behind schedule. In order to avoid sugary desserts, bring a beautiful bowl of freshly cut fruit. Remember, the presentation is what makes a dessert special!

Tip#3: Make sure the meal schedule suits your needs. I find it helpful to flip lunch and dinner. This way I can have a bigger meal around 1:00 or 2:00 pm and eat a smaller meal later in the evening. This is actually better for your digestion!

Tip #4: Go outside for a walk after Thanksgiving dinner. Take the kids or other family members or friends with you. Walk around the neighborhood and make a game out of it (I tell them to count the white houses or the squirrels or whatever to keep the kids occupied). Breathe the fresh air. Sometimes you will smell wood burning in fireplaces. The outdoor walk will boost your psychological well being.

Your December holiday. No matter what faith tradition you are, we all celebrate something with family, friends, or co-workers in December.

Tip #5: Do not stress yourself out getting ready for the holiday. Does it really matter how many decorations you put up? Make the holiday easier for yourself. I avoid obsessing over shopping for gifts by giving cash or a check wherever appropriate. The receiver can spend it anywhere and pick out exactly what he or she likes. Besides, sometimes with the after Christmas sales, that money

goes even further. The receiver won't be disappointed with the wrong style, size, color, etc. And you won't need to exchange or return anything.

Tip#6: Focus on faith, family, and friends, not food. Every family is not the ideal, loving, warm and fuzzy kind you see on TV or in the movies. Don't set your expectations on perfect family harmony if this is what will most likely not happen. Do whatever you need to do to get your focus off food. Sing traditional songs, spend time with the kids as they play with their new toys, and try to stay out of the kitchen!

Tip#7: Use the Serenity Prayer as often as necessary. Everybody has a family member who knows what buttons to push to get us upset and cause us to react in a way that is unhealthy for us, in other words, "drive us to eat." Ask your Higher Power to push the opposite button to get you emotionally calm. Use the Serenity Prayer as often as necessary!

New Year's Eve and Day

Tip #8: You are entitled to celebrate just like everyone else. Substitute something allowed on your food plan for the real thing. Raise a glass of diet ginger ale. Your friends might not even know it's not the real thing. If you go out to a restaurant to eat, check the menu online first to make sure there is something you can have. I order an entrée and ask for a box for leftovers when the food arrives. Then I eat correct portions and save the leftovers for another meal! If I eat at someone's home or I am at a social gathering and the food is served buffet style, I survey everything first so I can "weigh" my options and make choices that meet my needs.

General advice

Tip #9: Come to EXTRA meetings over the holidays for strength, support, and reinforcement. You need to make time for yourself and your program. No one can do this for you.

Tip#10: Be a participant in the holidays by focusing on the meaning of the celebration instead of the food associated with it. Don't feel you are denying yourself anything. Just make the adjustments that you need to maintain your abstinence.

Tip#11: Stay away from people, situations, and places that are difficult for you. I avoid all-you-can-eat buffets because I cannot stand to see everyone fill their plate several times. Don't let anyone talk you into tasting something you know you can't handle.

Tip #12: Take care of yourself first. Especially during this time of the year, you must be the priority. This is being smart, not selfish! Just like you are told during airplane emergency instructions to put on your oxygen mask first so that you can help others, so must you put your abstinence first.

Tip #13: Make a plan, discuss it with your sponsor, and then stick to it! Enjoy the holidays. Do what works for you. By staying abstinent, you can be "happy, joyous, and free." You will have a great October through January with NO REGRETS! **By following these suggestions you, too, can stay safe and sane over the holidays.**

From the *Staying Safe and Sane Through the Holiday Season* Workshop
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