

# Navigating Holiday Eating with Confidence

*For someone recovering from an eating disorder, the food-centric festivities that surround nearly every holiday can be overwhelming. Whether you're in recovery or supporting someone who is, any kind of celebration can be a difficult time. How can you navigate with confidence?*

The key to success is preparation. Knowing the details of holiday events will minimize stress, anxiety and fear associated with parties, meals and holiday gatherings. Planning ahead and relying on the support of family, friends and treatment professionals will go a long way toward successfully navigating these challenging times and experiencing a lasting recovery.

## Holiday Tips for Those in Recovery:

- Shift the focus from food and counting calories to celebrating and spending time with loved ones.
- Stay away from any kind of good food/bad food talk.
- Be aware of your stress level and avoid "overbooking" your schedule with holiday functions.
- Keep your treatment professionals close at hand. Work with them to carefully plan balanced meals in advance. If you're a member of a support group, stay connected to other members during this time; serving as a support to others can aid your recovery process as well.
- Know how to take a break when events become overwhelming.
- Before attending a holiday gathering, consider calling the host to ask what foods will be served. Bring along "safe food" if necessary.
- Holiday meals can be an opportunity for progress. Practice a three-meal-per-day schedule. Don't go to a holiday function hungry or skip meals in preparation for a larger one.
- Surround yourself with people who have healthy relationships with their bodies, food and weight. When attending gatherings, bring a trusted family member or friend with you if you can.
- Keep lines of communication open and involve your family and friends in your challenges, victories and goals.
- If you are comfortable doing so, share information about your eating disorder with family and friends. Knowing this is a difficult time for you will help them provide support.

## Helping a Family Member or Friend Navigate Holiday Occasions:

- Ask your family member or friend what you can do to best support them.
- Ease into the holiday season by focusing on activities that don't involve food, such as putting up decorations or sending cards.
- Stress levels can escalate during a holiday gathering. Offering a loved one the chance to "escape" for a few moments can help keep emotions in check.
- Be aware of the comments you make, especially around a friend or loved one recovering from disordered eating. Don't dwell on topics such as diets, calorie counting, weight or even portion sizes.
- Develop some sort of signal or sign that your family member or friend can use when he or she needs a subject change or a moment away to regroup.
- Be conscious of the snacks and treats displayed during holiday times. Reducing the availability of snacks can help your family member or friend maintain their regular eating schedule.
- Have patience and express your continued support.
- Consider family therapy as a valuable tool to help the entire family navigate this emotional time. Many treatment centers offer family programs.
- Celebrate the small steps and accomplishments.
- Make recovery a priority. Altering holiday traditions in the short term can significantly impact your family member's or friend's wellbeing in the long term.





*“If things don’t go as planned, realize that one meal doesn’t make or break you,” explains Marla Scanzello, MS, RD, Director of Dietary Services for Eating Recovery Center. “Simply get back on track with the next meal.”*

## Remember...

- ... eating disorders do not discriminate.
- ... individuals are predisposed to an eating disorder based on genetics and previous behaviors.
- ... more than 11 million American men and women struggle with eating disorders.
- ... an estimated 10 - 15 percent of people with anorexia or bulimia are male.
- ... as many as 10 percent of college women suffer from an eating disorder.

Marla Scanzello, MS, RD, Director of Dietary Services for Eating Recovery Center, explains that the key to navigating holiday eating with confidence lies in realizing where your family member, your friend or you are in the recovery process. She also emphasizes the importance of support, flexibility and acknowledgment of needs.

If an eating disorder does escalate during holiday times, seeking treatment at a facility specializing in eating disorder care may be the best course of action. A variety of treatment centers across the country offer different specializations and treatment options, as well as the ability to treat patients requiring different levels of care. It is important to choose a treatment facility based on what fits your family member’s, your friend’s or your own needs in order to experience a lasting recovery. Eating Recovery Center can be a valuable partner in your search for treatment options.



## About Eating Recovery Center

Eating Recovery Center, situated at the foot of the Rockies in beautiful downtown Denver, Colorado, provides individuals 17 and older sustainable recovery for eating disorders in a warm, nurturing environment. Our comprehensive program offers patients from across the country a continuum of care that includes inpatient, residential, partial hospitalization, intensive outpatient and outpatient services in a Joint Commission accredited, licensed behavioral hospital setting. Our compassionate team of professionals collaborates with treating professionals and loved ones to cultivate lasting behavioral change. For more information please contact us at 877-218-1344 or [info@EatingRecoveryCenter.com](mailto:info@EatingRecoveryCenter.com) or confidentially chat live on our website at [www.EatingRecoveryCenter.com](http://www.EatingRecoveryCenter.com).