

# Navigating Holiday Stress and Avoiding Relapses for Addicts

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Holidays blow in like a whirlwind of frenzied activity, and are welcomed by many people with decorations, multi-colored lights, and big celebrations. Holidays also bring along a multitude of stress that can be difficult to handle, [especially](#) for a recovering addict.

Large family get-togethers, prying questions, old triggers, or loneliness can be enough to push an addict toward a relapse. With a proactive game plan, you can navigate the holiday season and emerge on the other side with your sobriety intact.

## **Take One Day at a Time**

When you wake up in the morning, focus on how you want to stay sober today. Think about your plans for the day and what types of environments you will be in. Remind yourself that you can resist any temptations and will stay sober.

Take [care](#) of your health by eating regular healthy meals and getting in some exercise. This will keep blood sugar regulated, boost your mood, boost your confidence, and help you avoid irritability and resist impulses.

Keep expectations realistic for the holidays. Building things up in your mind or expecting everything to run smoothly can set you up for an emotional let down. You can't control anyone but yourself, so focus on maintaining your sobriety no matter what the holidays throw at you.

## **Parties and Family Events**

Know which situations or people might set off your triggers and avoid them. Some options are to arrive early so that you can leave earlier, and drive yourself so that you will have an easy way to leave when you want to. Limit time you spend with people that do not respect your [boundaries](#) or elicit temptation.

Be aware of what may be in your food and drinks. If you're a [recovering](#) alcoholic, being handed drinks or desserts with alcohol in them could trigger relapse. Serve yourself or bring your own snacks and drinks to have in hand to avoid the possibility of being handed things you will have to decline.

Try to get friends or family involved in activities other than just sitting around talking and drinking. Suggest board games, holiday movies, sporting events, or playing in the snow. Keeping yourself active will curb cravings and alleviate stress.

Be prepared for awkward questions from relatives regarding your recovery if they know. You can have some simple responses planned and not feel the need to go into long explanations. Worst case scenario, just change the subject.

If you'll be hosting your own get-together, you'll have a lot of preparation to do from house cleaning before (and after) to providing food and drink. Consider hiring [someone else](#) to do the cleaning to reduce your workload (and stress-load). For food, why not have a potluck, where guests bring dishes with them? This will also take a great deal of the weight off your shoulders. When it comes to deciding what beverages to offer, opt to stick with non-alcoholic options so that you're not tempting yourself. You may think it's a good idea to at least offer these options to your guests, but not having them will not only

eliminate your own temptations, but it will help show your guests that you're serious about your own recovery.

## **When Feeling Stress or Cravings**

Distraction is a useful tool to curb cravings. When you recognize possible triggers, move to a different area or seek out someone you trust to strike up a conversation with. Help someone with small tasks that they are attending to, or find an activity to get involved with.

Support systems are imperative. Don't be afraid to call a trusted friend or sponsor to talk when feeling [stressed](#). Attending extra [AA](#) or [NA](#) meetings during the holidays can give you an extra confidence boost to get through stressful situations. You can plan ahead to find [meetings](#) even if you are out of town.

## **Give Back**

You are not the only one battling temptations of relapse. Make an effort to reach out and help other recovering addicts during the holidays. Help them through meetings or attend functions with them to facilitate their sobriety. Helping others navigate the holidays can be just as beneficial to you by helping you develop pride in your own recovery.

Focusing on others can distract from your issues and remind you of the things for which you can be grateful. With a positive attitude and plans in place for situations that may arise, you can successfully avoid relapse and have a wonderful holiday season.