

HOW TO SURVIVE THE HOLIDAYS and STAY CLEAN AND SOBER

1. **Don't try to get through this all by yourself.** Get connected with others who can support you in staying clean and sober. It does not have to be your close friend or a partner. Your sponsor, your counselor/therapist, or someone who has had a few years of sobriety can also be quite helpful. It's never too late to ask for help but it is better to let someone know about your needs a week or two before the actual risky time (e.g. a week or two before Thanksgiving).
2. Create and carry a **list of phone numbers** for people who can support you in your recovery. This can include a list of emergency numbers, a relapse prevention hotline (415) 834-1144 or a drug line (415) 362-3400. The list can also include some 12-step 24-hour support numbers. You can also post the list in a visible place like your refrigerator or near your alarm clock.
3. Plan a **clean and sober gathering** at your house or help a friend organize one. Doing so can give you more control over potential triggers and allow another way to get support.
4. **Go to meetings.** In fact, go to more meetings than you normally do. It is important to spend some time with people who are going through similar experiences. Also, many meeting locations hold clean and sober celebrations during the holiday season, including parties on Christmas & New Years eve.
5. **Get out of yourself.** Focus on someone else's wishes or needs. Help someone you know or volunteer.
6. **Share your gratitude** by writing letters or cards to people you care about or would like to get closer to. You can tell each person the traits that you value most in them, things they have done that meant a lot to you, and ways you value them as a friend/partner/co-worker. You can also offer to make them something (cake, dinner, sweater, etc) or do a chore they find difficult, or house-sit, farm-sit, pet-sit, babysit, etc.
7. Tell as many people as you can **ahead of time** that you are trying to avoid drinking and/or using drugs.
8. **Avoid parties where alcohol and/or drugs might be present** (this includes people who are high or drunk). If you must go: 1) before the party, make at least one commitment to call someone from your support list; 2) if you can manage it, come to the party late or leave early to have less time to be exposed to potential triggers; 3) go with someone who can help you avoid picking up a drink/drug; 4) make arrangements to do something clean and sober after the party.
9. **Don't feed the beast.** A single craving has a physiological life of up to about 30 minutes. If you wait long enough without reinforcing the craving (like browsing through the liquor store or dialing your dealer's number over and over again), its intensity will go down, which in turn can give you enough room for better coping.
10. **Try to walk away** from the trigger. If you can't do it physically, try doing it mentally first - focus on something else, close your eyes, relax your body, breathe slowly, tell yourself that "this too shall pass."
11. **Practice refusing an offer** of alcohol and/or drugs. Go beyond "Just Say No" - think of several possible scenarios and write down your potential responses. The more you PRACTICE, the better you will get at it.
12. **Play out the mental tape** of what would happen if you got drunk and/or high. Make sure you do it all the way, not just for an hour or one day. Think about HOW NOT TO REPEAT the holidays that were ruined by your drinking or using drugs.
13. **Imagine what your ideal holiday would look like.** Then, think about REALISTIC WAYS you can make this holiday closer to that ideal. Invent your own traditions.
14. Create a list of things that can help you **relax and distract yourself** from the triggers (index cards can be handy). Your list can include things that cover your 5 senses (smell, touch, vision, taste, & hearing).
15. **Don't beat yourself up** if things don't go exactly the way you want them. Don't punish yourself and remember that guilt & shame can be triggers too. Be kind to yourself and **keep trying!**