



HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE SANCTURARY

December 2002
PO Box 1919 Dayton, OH

[The following ideas are OA members' suggestions for getting through holidays abstinently.]

1. Focus on the true meaning of the holiday or event rather than the food orgy that sometimes accompanies it.

2. Don't set yourself up to feel bad because of unrealistic expectations of what the holiday will bring. Sometimes we're with family, sometimes with friends and sometimes we are alone. Face the reality of the situation beforehand. For example, if a family occasion almost always turns unpleasant, plan not to be part of the unpleasantness. If you're going to be alone, face that you may face sadness. Plan to deal with it, without excess food.

3. Build up your recovery bank account before and during the holidays by attending lots of meetings, working extra hard on your Twelve Steps and using all the tools, especially service. Keep in constant contact with your sponsor. The disease doesn't take holidays, nor should our recovery.

4. Keep your OA phone numbers with you at all times. Use them.

5. Know the limits of your recovery. When in doubt, avoid persons, places and things that have in the past triggered overeating. The party is not worth it. Choose not to attend if you feel it may be a major problem. Remember that abstinence, one day at a time, has to be the highest priority in your life. Without it, all other things suffer.

6. From the perspective of food, treat the holiday like any other day. Our disease never takes a holiday.

7. Plan something special for yourself when other people are eating sugary desserts that you choose not to include in your food plan. Special teas, hot water and lemon, fruit, anything that's a little special for you.

8. Whether a holiday gathering or ordinary parties, choose to focus on the people rather than

the food. Pick out people and engage them in "real" conversation. If they don't want to play, go to the next one. People like to talk about themselves. Ask them about themselves, their life, their work, and really listen.

9. Try to connect with people at the holiday table. Make food a secondary thing.

10. At Halloween, there is no law that says you have to give out candy. Give nutritious things or money. Do not give out things you would not consume yourself. Then there's no problem with leftovers.

11. Set an extra place beside you at the table (in your mind or for real) for your Higher Power or your sponsor.

12. Remember Step Two. It says that with the help of a Higher Power, we can be restored to sane eating behavior. Call on your Higher Power. HP can keep you sane, one day at a time, one meal at a time.

13. During the holidays, get out of yourself by giving service, any service, whether it's to program, to needy individuals or to the community. Do something that may be a little hard for you, but that you know you will feel good about later. Give yourself something to respect yourself for.

14. Plan! Plan! Plan! Be proactive toward the holidays and the meals. Don't just lay back and hope for the best. Rehearse in your mind over and over exactly what you will do, particularly what, where and when you will eat. Pray just before sitting down to the meal.

15. Just before sitting down to eat, or just before being served, go to a private room somewhere in the house or restaurant, call your sponsor and commit what you are about to eat, as well as what you will choose not to eat. It makes no difference whether you get your sponsor on an answering machine. It's your commitment.

16. If you're visiting others for a holiday dinner, it's up to you to know what is being served and whether it is something that you choose to eat.

Call the host. Plan accordingly. People understand others' food limitations. Even people without our disease have foods they don't eat for one reason or another. Volunteer to bring something that's good for you. The host thinks you're gracious, and you're taking care of yourself.

17. Remember that you are responsible for what you eat. It's easy when sitting with family to slip into old, childish roles where you feel you must eat whatever you are given. It's not true. We are adults and responsible for our own choices. It's up to us to take care of ourselves. It's up to us to set whatever boundaries we need to set with our families.

18. Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude. There is nothing as good for staying abstinent, particularly during the holiday season, as focusing on the many things we have, rather than what we don't have. Do gratitude lists frequently.

19. How about writing a little card/note to each person who will be at the holiday dinner table telling them why you're grateful to know them? Leave it at their dinner place. The focus will quickly get to the real meaning of the holiday rather than on the food.

20. For many of us, the most dangerous period for our abstinence is after we have successfully gone through a difficult occasion. The insanity of our disease subconsciously tells us to reward ourselves with food because we did so well yesterday. Or, we suffer some kind of letdown about the occasion. It didn't meet our expectations. Some of us feel emptiness after holidays that in the past we have tried to fill with food. For these reasons, plan to go to meetings the next day after the holiday.

21. A holiday is not a crisis. Holidays come every year. They are simply calendar times set aside to honor certain things. We deal with the holidays just like we deal with the rest of the days in the year. You can do it. Relax and work your program the way you know how.

22. Read your Big Book, work your morning and evening program, call your sponsor.

-Some are reprinted from an OA workshop in Port Chester, New York USA

Holiday's in New Mexixo

As I am about to return to Ohio, I think of the

differences I see in people and attitudes towards food here in Indiana.

I can see that being closer to the great outdoors in New Mexico has had a tremendous benefit to my weight loss. Also, being around my friend Karen, who eats lots of "co-op" food (i.e., organic) from the Silver City Co-op has helped me once again eat right

Here in Indiana, I see so many overweight people walking around; it must be like one of two. Lots of food to eat and not much of any ways to work it off.

Amazing. I ask God to please help me stay active while I am on this trip. To get to OA meetings as soon as I can in Ohio (none in Logansport, IN while I am here). I am grateful I have a good, solid, OA group of people in Silver City, NM. One meeting a week for me (there is another one for women only during the week).

Karen told me last night she found a wonderful two-bedroom apartment and one of those bedrooms will be for me. I love her very much. We like to walk together. I do not know where that relationship will go, but I do know I love her. I feel clear that all the 20+ years of work in recovery, and as long in therapy, have helped me learn how to be in a relationship so much more.

Learning to be my own person, with my own set of needs, wants, desires, hopes, dreams, thoughts, feelings, and impulses. Having a firm commitment to AA, Al-Anon and OA ... no matter WHAT relationship I might be in ... is critical. If I do not recover for me, who will? If I do not attend as many meetings as I need to, who will? If I do not work my program, daily, who will? I am sure that when she moves to Las Cruces, I will spend time there. I am hopeful we will become a partnership in love. It is wonderful to be this much in love.

I thank God for my recovery, and for all the work I have done over the years. Much of it, when I retrospect, is basically ... living a program of recovery, day by day ... and pretty soon, the horizon of "getting there" disappears in "being there." Being there is basically, being in today, doing what needs to be done, and remembering that nothing is too big ... or too little, for me to ask God's support for.

And that is my holiday message. Every day is a holiday that I eat to live, rather than live to eat.

Any day I can say it that way, I know I am in recovery.

Jerry E.

Self-Love Vs. Food Love

I love who I am more than what I eat.

This is a huge revelation. This was not true when I first came OA.

One thing I have noticed is most compulsive overeaters have several things in common, one of which being self-loathing. The program teaches us to like ourselves...to take care of ourselves first, to place our program of recovery foremost in our lives. Most of us thought to place ourselves first would be selfish, so we never had. We must unlearn this kind of thinking to find recovery from this disease.

“Loving who I am more than what I eat” is a huge revelation that OA has taught me. I am a compulsive overeater (COE) and always will be. I realize that, from time to time, I will have strong cravings to compulsively overeat and/or eat foods not on my food plan, like candy and high carbohydrate foods. The differences are the Promises. If you work the program, it will work for you! However, there will be times, since we will always be COE, that we have these strong cravings. What has helped me so much is to think of the consequences. How will I feel 10 minutes after I eat the forbidden food, two hours after, 4 hours after????? Then I actually feel how I am feeling right now. Is the food worth giving up on me? Do I love myself more than I love that particular food I am craving? Do I remember what that food tastes like? Since I remember, and I always do, why do I need to taste it again?

I must keep in touch with the suffering this disease causes. As my recovery increases, I must not forget the suffering I felt when I first started the OA program. What helps me remember this is meetings. There are people at various stages of this disease; thus, we can always see various stages of suffering. Presently, I attend 3 meetings a week. During the holidays, I intend to increase that number. Why? I will do anything to keep my abstinence. What works is going to meetings,

reminding myself who I am, being with others like me. I am worth the effort. OA has taught me this.

Anonymous

Working the steps with your sponsor or someone that you trust in program. That will be the best gift you give yourself in the coming year. Be Hold, Be Bold Be Told if someone hasn't asked you to work the Steps ask someone for the help. There are many who have been around for a long time waiting to give the gift of life. There are many who couldn't stay very long because they were afraid to work the steps, live the steps and then give them away to someone else. Some said they just didn't have the time.

Remember we don't have to live this way anymore. There's a new way and it is good!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! But it isn't easy. Nothing good ever is.

Anonymous“

Why Abstinence Is Important To Me”

All I have is several years of my experience, strength and hope from being in 12 step meetings and living life, but I do know a few things. If I do not learn how to handle life on life's terms when things are “good”, I am doomed to know how to handle them when things are not so good. For me, maintaining abstinence with food as well as with my feelings is essential to do this. Not just during holidays or vacations, but on Monday. In April. At supper time. All the time.

I came to OA in 1988 with just enough hope that I could find a way to stop overeating and stay stopped plus be happy and sane at the same time. I had more pain than I could continue to bear to keep on doing what I was doing with food and with how I lived my life.

I heard that I needed to take a look at my eating. Not just what and how much, but to get real honest and look at why. The “why” can continue to baffle me as well as others. The Big Book says on page 23 “If you ask him (her) why he (she) started on that last bender (binge), the chances are he (she) will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes these excuses have a certain plausibility but none of them really makes sense in the light of the havoc an alcoholic's (compulsive eater) drinking (eating) bout creates.Once in a while he (she) may tell the

truth. And the truth, strange to say, is usually that he (she) has no more idea why he (she) took that first drink (bite) than you have. Some drinkers (eaters) have excuses with which they are satisfied part of the time. But in their hearts they really do not know why they do it. Once this malady has real hold they are a baffled lot. There is the obsession that somehow, someday, they will beat the game. But they often suspect they are down for the count. “

What does this all mean for me? For me, it continues to mean that it does not matter WHY I am like this. What matters is **ACCEPTING THAT I AM AND DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

The only “something” that has ever given me the peace and serenity I am seeking is to turn my eating and life over to a Power Greater Than Myself, holding nothing back. That allows me to use that power to abstain from the harmful eating my disease tells me is “OK” because it is a special occasion, I am on “vacation”, because I have been “good”; because I am not “that bad”; or “not as bad as”, because I “deserve to”.

I deserve to be abstinent. On the days that are just regular days as well as on those days that are extremely stressful or painful.

If I do not use this power that I have found, that others told me worked for them, to be abstinent during the calm, how will I be able to take care of myself when things are not so good?

What about if OA is not where I am? Does that mean I no longer have that Power available to me? Of course not. My HP is everywhere I am. **EVERYWHERE.** What if I travel to where there is no OA? What if I **MOVE** to where there is no OA and I start a meeting and **NO ONE** else comes? What then? I am so grateful to be in an area where there are abundant OA meetings available. But if one of the other situations above occurs, I cannot stop doing what I have been doing. I do not abstain merely because I go to OA meetings and “have to”. I “had to” abstain until I “wanted to” abstain. And on those rare days that I do not want to abstain from binge foods or overeating, I had best remember what I did when I “had to” abstain and do that again until I regain

my clarity of vision and focus that reassures me that I “want” to abstain.

So, my recovery is far more dependent on my maintaining my spiritual fitness no matter what is going on, no matter where I go, than my recovery is dependent on any particular OA meeting or service work. Service is very crucial to my recovery. There is no doubt about it. However, spiritual fitness is far more crucial to my abstinence than any other action I take for my recovery. From food plans, sponsorship, service, attending meetings etc.

I do not abstain because I “have to”. I do it because I want to and my recovery hinges on it. Whether or not OA is nearby. OA was there for me when I was ready for what it offered. I give service to give back what was so freely given to me. If my only or primary reason for abstaining is because I have committed to a sponsor or because I do not think I am welcome in an OA meeting if I do not abstain, I am “dieting”, not abstaining. I also will not have “surrendered”. Surrender is essential to recovery. Just as my need to “change” is essential to my recovery. If I am not willing to surrender, if I am not willing to abstain, then I am not willing to recover. Yet.

What have I heard from others as to why they do not abstain or why they stopped abstaining? Because they were not going to meetings-it is not a requirement to go to meetings to abstain. But going to meetings keeps me real in touch with what can happen to my attitude about abstaining if I do not go to meetings. I hear that some do not abstain because they did not have a sponsor. I certainly understand the thinking behind these reasons, but for me, to use these reasons for not abstaining I am transferring the power and strength of my own accountability to another human being. I must always remember that “No human power could have relieved my compulsive eating”. I am accountable to my HP and to myself. Nobody else. But, voicing that commitment to another human being and to my HP brings my recovery to a whole new realm. I must be accountable to something, someone or I “forget” who and what I am. Lest I forget, I am destined to repeat the actions of the past that caused me such intense suffering.

So, I am going to do today what I have done for many days before; I need to stay centered and focused on recovery, not on overeating and not on ignoring the facts of what I do with food and with my life when I think “I” am in charge.

As we prepare to go into the “eating season” I need to be very aware of my steady purpose. My steady purpose is to abstain no matter what. If I do not abstain in regular times it will be so much harder to even consider abstaining during the tough ones.

May we all be blessed with an abstinent life; not just during the holidays but on the regular days.

God truly does for me what I cannot do for myself. One day at a time.

**In OA Love and Service,
Becky C.**

It may be a cool idea for someone to set an all day meeting up for Christmas day and take turns being there to chair an hour. Maybe only a couple meetings. They are doing this in Cincinnati on Thanksgiving and it sounded like a terrific idea to me. If there are any takers for the idea contact Claudia 298 8216. Key will be provided.