

# 12 Tips to Staying Clean and Sober during the Holidays

For those that have been in recovery from substance use disorder for a while, some of the greatest joy and inner freedom has come to you from staying clean and sober. It's important to protect yourself from relapse during this holiday season when the alcohol, excitement, and emotions flow more readily than usual.

If you are newly clean and sober, we want to extend you some hope. Feel confident that the best years of your life lie ahead of you. The 12-step programs (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous) offer many promises. Life will take on a new meaning, and you will know happiness like you have never known before.

You may ask...

What are some tips for staying sober during the holidays?

Why stay clean and sober? Everyone else is having a good time with alcohol and party drugs!?!?

What can I do to safeguard against losing my sobriety and recovery?

What can I do to help stay clean and sober?

To help support your sobriety over the next few months, we feel it's important to share with you our "12 Tips to Staying Clean and Sober during the Holidays".

Use these strategic tips to support your sobriety over the next few months:

1. **Plan Ahead.** Always take your own vehicle to holiday parties so YOU can control your destiny. Also, take a sober companion with you for support and pay close attention to relapse triggers: H.A.L.T: Hungry. Angry. Lonely. Tired. Arrive early and leave early.
2. **Make Self Care a Priority.** Celebrate the holiday season by taking care of your body, mind, and soul. We cannot be our very best if we are depleted. Give yourself the gift of time for yourself: an acupuncture treatment, a yoga class, time for meditation, and prayer. Proper nutrition and plenty of healthy physical movement will make you feel stronger, both physically and emotionally.
3. **Increase Support.** We can get overwhelmed by the erratic nature of the season, so as you plan each day in November and December, start with 12-step support as your first priority. This could mean bookending a holiday event with phone calls to someone in recovery before and after the event. Commit to attending a 12-step meeting (or two) each day and invite a friend to attend with you. Also, if you're traveling to another city, plan ahead and make sure you attend meetings there as well or pick up a phone meeting.
4. **Be mindful of time spent around your relatives – know your limits.** We all have our own version of crazy Aunt Mildred who is going to criticize your career choice and make you feel “less than” or Uncle Harry who will insist on you having his famous holiday drink. And even worse, we most likely have strained family relationships that have been simmering for years. This type of stress can lead us to rationalize and convince ourselves we are entitled to a drink.

Instead, surround yourself with supportive loved ones that will help you follow the steps to staying clean and sober.

5. **Have your props ready.** When you arrive at a party, immediately get a non-alcoholic beverage and keep it in your hand. Whether it's sparkling water or soda, others won't be inclined to push drinks on you constantly. And, the truth of the matter is people never really notice or pay attention to what's in your glass.
6. **Celebrate relationships.** As you consider holiday occasions, think about them as a way to make new friendships and perhaps rekindle old relationships with friends. Instead of making the event about drinking and eating as a priority, intentionally make it about "people" and building relationships; go into each party looking forward to establishing real connections.
7. **Eat well.** The holidays don't give us the green light to overindulge. There's nothing worse than stuffing ourselves with too much sugar, carbs, and fat-laden foods that make us feel bad. So be proactive and choose healthy foods that will make you want to celebrate, not feel guilty.
8. **Service, not self.** When we can focus on others, we find more joy and gratitude. So look for ways to think about and serve others. Make a special family recipe and deliver it to friends. Donate your time at a homeless shelter, food pantry, or soup kitchen. Spend time with a neighbor who is confined. These spiritual opportunities allow us to spread happiness and cheer to others. Treat it as one of the benefits of staying clean and sober; being able to have a clear mind and body to help others.

9. **Create new traditions.** Celebrate the fact you are re-establishing your own life. As you affirm your new self on these festive days, you are choosing to celebrate the new, better, clean and sober life that you have created. This might mean hosting a sober, festive gathering with friends in recovery. It may mean volunteering to serve at local 12-Step support groups. Remember, giving is one of the best things you can do during the holidays.
10. **Avoid relapse triggers.** Of all triggers, the most significant can be emotional triggers. No matter if you are in recovery or not, the holiday season is one of the most stressful times of the year. With so many activities squeezed into one month, our normal routines get disrupted and people get frustrated and anxious. Also, there are increased demands from your spouse, partner, or other family members, and this can put serious stress on your sobriety. This can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, humiliation, embarrassment, anger, and depression. The holidays don't have to be "perfect" and just like in previous years. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Saying "no" is perfectly acceptable and it will protect you.
11. **Make sobriety your top priority.** If you think about it, all holiday parties are optional. If you don't think the activity is going to be good for your recovery, it's okay not to go. You can politely decline the party invite, but make a lunch date with the host for another day.
12. **Maintain your spirituality.** Our commercial world wants us to believe that joy can come from tinsel, booze, and shopping. It tells us the lie that happiness can be found in these. Instead, focus on the true spirit of the season.

Regardless of your faith or spiritual beliefs, the holidays are really about two things: giving and gratitude. When we focus on these, the other things such as resentment, disappointment, anger, worry, and self-loathing show up far less often and cannot find a foothold in our hearts.

Staying clean and sober is possible during the holiday season. It can be quite fun if we direct our attention towards people and activities that can help strengthen us on our road to recovery. Go, have fun, and enjoy your sobriety with those that matter: your loved ones.