

20 Ideas to Help You Stay Sober During The Holidays

For some people in recovery, the holidays can be tough. But you *can* make it to January with your sobriety intact. You don't have to let unfulfilled expectations, stressful family dynamics, or crazy in-laws threaten your recovery. Not to mention all those holiday parties.

You just need a bit of preparation. Start planning your sobriety strategy now....

Sober Holidays Tip #1: Remind yourself every single morning how good it feels to be sober (and how great it will feel come January). Plant that thought in your mind right now, and think about it every morning. Stick a note on your bathroom mirror to remind yourself to think about it

Sober Holidays Tip #2: Keep your expectations realistic, so you don't set yourself up for an emotional letdown. Getting sober doesn't mean life is instantly perfect. Other people in your life probably haven't changed, and many of the conflicts that crop up at family reunions will doubtless crop up again. Accept it, roll with the punches, and rein in the urge to manipulate everything and everyone. It will be enough for you to take care of and control yourself.

Sober Holidays Tip #3: Plan activities other than sitting around and gabbing. In many families, getting together for the holidays means sitting around and drinking. Investigate other options now. Movies, museums, holiday concerts, skating, walks, sledding, sports events can all help fill the time and limit stress. If weather keeps you inside, suggest activities that will keep everyone busy and focused, such as decorating holiday cookies, board games, or old movies.

Sober Holidays Tip #4: Limit the amount of time you spend with relatives who make you crazy. If everyone is gathering for the holiday, including your brother who drinks like a fish, plan on an overlap of just a day or two. If he arrives on Christmas Day and stays a week, you can arrive a couple of days before Christmas, help your hosts prepare, enjoy a quiet Christmas Eve, and leave the next day.

Sober Holidays Tip #5: If you're traveling, go to meetings wherever you are. Find a AA meeting long before you get there. This will give you the booster support shot you'll almost certainly need—the chance to say, “Sure, I love my family, but sometimes they drive me up the wall,” or to talk about whatever else it is that almost drives you to drink.

Sober Holidays Tip #6: If the holidays mean visiting your old hometown, take time to see old friends you enjoy; avoid those you used to drink or use drugs with. Make plans *now* for how you'll occupy your time while there, so you don't find yourself with time to kill and fleeting thoughts of visiting the people who are still drinking or using.

Sober Holidays Tip #7: Remember what Recovery Zone you're in. remember where you are in recovery. If you're in early recovery, the Red Zone, you are bound to be a bit shaky. Don't push yourself or leave yourself open to temptation. It's okay to have a quiet holiday season.

Sober Holidays Tip #8 Do a Recovery Zone ReCheck before the holidays get started. Think about the events coming up in the next few weeks. What situations could possibly set you on the road toward relapse? Seeing your ex-husband at a party? Having a fight with your mom? Having dinner with friends who drink? Make a plan now for how you will deal with these events; maybe you'll go to some extra meetings before you travel, and plan to call your sponsor or a fellowship friend if anything does happen. Or maybe you'll investigate online meetings now, before anything happens, so you can go to a meeting at a moment's notice.

Sober Holidays Tip #9: If you're flying and feeling vulnerable, ask for help.



Planes don't have "no alcohol" sections, so the person right next to you might order something alcoholic. What do you do? Ideally, fly with someone you know, someone who knows you are in recovery and will avoid drinking during the trip. If you're flying alone and feeling vulnerable, explain your situation to the flight attendant. Ask if he can help you change your seat if anyone next to you orders anything stronger than tomato juice. Swapping seats is almost always possible. If you do get stuck next to a drinker, close your eyes and meditate. Put your headphones on and zone out to music or a meditation recording, or watch the movie. If you have Wi-Fi on the plane, contact a friend in recovery for support. Another idea: If you worry you'll be tempted to stop at a bar on the way to the airport or inside the terminal, have a friend or your sponsor drop you off at the airport and then stay in touch with you via phone, text or video chat until you get on your plane and the cabin door is shut.

Sober Holidays Tip #10: Plan your own celebrations. If you aren't going traveling for the holidays, plan to celebrate with local AA or NA friends. If you haven't been invited, do the inviting yourself. Follow old family traditions or start some of your own.

Sober Holidays Tip #11: Take it easy! Get plenty of rest, watch what you eat, get your usual exercise, and take time for meditation. Maintain your recovery routine as much as possible.

Sober Holidays Tip #12 Don't romance the drink or drug. If everyone starts talking about the "good old days," leave the room. You don't want to start thinking about your drinking or using days. That can lead to preoccupation and obsession, and then to cravings. Keep your focus on your life right now, your life in recovery.

Sober Holidays Tip #13 Be very careful about what you eat and drink. Alcohol doesn't come only in a glass or a bottle. It can come in bowls and plates, too. And what you don't know *can* hurt you. One reason, of course, is that even a small amount of alcohol can trigger a relapse. How much does it take? A tiny drop? A small glass? There is no definitive answer, so it's best to avoid all alcohol and keep your risk as low as possible. Another reason is the psychological risk: the taste plus the "thrill" of knowing that you're consuming alcohol could turn on a compulsion to drink. Remember, the addiction is in the person, not the substance; it's critical to stay away from that slippery slope of guessing what might be risky for you.

Sober Holidays Tip #14 Bring recovery reading when you travel.



Get recovery literature on your phone

Sober Holidays Tip #15 Practice TAMERS every day. Don't let up on your brain healing activities. Practice TAMERS every day:

- Think about recovery, Talk about recovery
- Act on recovery, connect with others
- Meditate and Minimize stress
- Exercise and Eat well
- Relax
- Sleep

Sober Holidays Tip #16 Make a plan for dealing with cravings. Write up a list of what works for you: calling someone, reading recovery books, a quick workout at the gym, prayer. Think about what has worked for you in the past, and be sure you are ready with some solutions. Can't think of anything? Try to stay sober for just one minute. Then two minutes. Then start doing something (wash the dishes, read the news), and set your alarm for five minutes. When you've managed to get through five minutes, try for ten. Keep increasing the time. Tell yourself you only need to focus on not drinking right now, this minute, this hour, this day.

Sober Holidays Tip #17 Remember that being in recovery doesn't mean instant heaven or a perfect life. Coming to grips with the idea that sobriety is not instant heaven is an important step in recovery. Most people with addiction expect their upside-down world to immediately turn right side up. That rarely happens. If you've been misusing alcohol or drugs for a while, your brain may need several months or even longer to set itself right. Give yourself time to build a happy new life.

Sober Holidays Tip #18 It's okay to tell people you are now in recovery. There is a lot less stigma these days to being in recovery. Nearly everyone knows someone who is in recovery and very open about it. It's your choice whether or not you want to tell people. One good reason to be open about it: If your friends don't know you've given up alcohol, they may lead you into temptation without intending to. Another reason: When you let it be known that you don't drink, you offer support and encouragement to others who are thinking about sobriety but are afraid to take the leap. You just might be the catalyst that gets someone else started on recovery.

Sober Holidays Tip #19 Make a plan for staying sober at parties. Decide in advance that there's no way in the world that you will drink or use drugs at the event. Ask for help from your Higher Power, because you may need it. Know and rehearse exactly what you will say if someone asks, "Would you like a drink?" or "Want to do a line?"

Sober Holidays Tip #20 Stay sober at the party: Serve yourself. If you can, bring your own water bottle or glass full of soda, so you don't even have to go near the bar. If you don't bring your own, when you arrive head straight to the liquid refreshments and help yourself to a safe option. Keep your beverage in your hand for the rest of your time at the party (refill as needed). That way you won't have to keep turning down offers of something to drink. People won't be asking you and unknowingly tempting you. If you set your drink down while dancing or when you step into the bathroom, get a new one when you return. Don't take a chance on anyone having accidentally switched drinks or good-naturedly topped yours off, or even worse, slipped a drug into it.