

Abstinence Through The Holidays



So much of what I have experienced since I came into program early in 2010 has been a life transformation. Here I will share a bit about what holidays were like before program, and what they are like now. It is a miraculous contrast!!

Growing up, at holiday time (to be honest, it was all the time), food was my central focus. I may have felt some awkwardness in social and family gatherings, so food gave me something delicious, fun and exciting to look forward to and concentrate on. As a fat girl, I felt like everyone was watching me and scrutinizing me all the time. I knew my parents wanted me to be thin and more normal about food, but I just wanted to be left alone.

I grew up in a family where feelings were never discussed. In particular, anger, sadness and fear were seen as inappropriate. My parents communicated that feelings were to be buried or ignored. Also, there was an explicit judgment and criticism of "those people" who displayed, expressed, or reacted to feelings. One time, for example, when I was crying, my father said to me, "Don't think that crying will get you what you want." I was very hurt by this comment. I took my father's remark to mean that he saw all crying as manipulation. I may have needed support or comfort, but I got shamed. I felt embarrassed and alone.

In addition to the squelching of feelings, my mother was a chef and baker. She created magnificent food for many guests. She loved entertaining and she loved the accolades from visitors. Every Sabbath and holiday we had guests at our house. I wished we could have had more intimate family times, but my mother wasn't satis-

fied without preparing for and serving an army of people. She took great pride in this. All meals with guests, and especially holiday meals, had a lot of what we used to call, "Fattening foods." I won't describe them in detail here, but we had six courses, multiple main dishes and side dishes, tons of carbohydrates, and at least three homemade desserts. As an impulsive and suppressed child, I came to look forward to and enjoy an opportunity with many guests around where I could hide in the abundance of food, and escape the scrutiny of my family. It was very painful being fat (AKA wrong) in a family that denied feelings, had a plethora of judgement, and provided endless dessert and comfort food.

When I came into OA and began working the steps, I derived a food plan. I checked in with my fellows about what a good food plan might include and leave out. For the first time, I was at the helm of a journey exploring my feelings and desires without my parents looking over my shoulders. I am grateful that I was able to put down my many binge foods, over time, and begin to bring my food portions into the right balance with body's nutritional needs. I discovered a Higher Power that could do for me what I could not do for myself. I worked and continue to work my program every day. My disease does not take a holiday or a vacation; thus I bring recovery with me to every holiday and every vacation. I call my sponsor every day, I do regular reading and writing, I speak to my sponsees about their programs, pray and meditate regularly, and with all that, find myself willing to eat abstainently.

During the process of letting go of my previously adored foods, I was very sad. I grieved the loss of each food like the loss of a close friend or love. I had to accept that food would not be in my life as my central pleasure anymore. I am not a bit sad about this today! I am entirely grateful and peaceful that when holidays come, I know that I eat only protein, fruits, vegetables, and oils. I feel grateful after the meals where I used to be part of the crowd, moaning in pain and bemoaning how much we'd all eaten. I am not stuffed to the gills anymore. I can breathe, and walk, and relax. I can even enjoy the company of others with a new focus on relationships and taking the good while leaving the rest! It is possible. I don't care if I ever eat dessert again. – Michelle JB

Upcoming Events

Service Made Simple Workshop
December 3, 2-5 at YWCA
White Plains

Registration for Region 6 Convention 2018: Portland Maine: *We Light The Way* - \$30 Super Early Bird registration runs from Noon on October 22- November 11, 2017

Region 9 Assembly in London
September 26-30 2018.

Hamilton Annual Retreat: March 16-18 2018 "Our invitation to you"
Houchen House in Hamilton, New Zealand

How In The World Will I Get Through The Holidays?

Everywhere I turn there is food that is not on my plan—in fact, that food sometimes seems to be the very reason for the season. Plus, I have a million more things to get taken care of this time of year and I'm overwhelmed. And hey, let's add to the mixing bowl a heaping helping of visiting relatives who push my buttons and insist that "just one taste won't hurt!" (My favorite: "Oh, there's hardly any sugar in my pineapple surprise; it's sweetened with fruit, so you can have it." "Really, how much sugar is 'hardly any'?" "Just two cups!") Yikes! Better have an OA friend on speed dial.

But just like the Pineapple Surprise, if I head into the holidays with that attitude, it's a recipe for disaster. Back before program, that was often exactly how I approached this time of year, only I had no intention of avoiding sugar; In fact I was eating as much as possible and ignoring the sick feelings of guilt, shame and low self-esteem until New Year's Day, when I would go on my new diet and exercise plan, and THIS time I was going to stick to it! Until I didn't.

Well, I've been in the rooms for more than 25 years now, and I love the holidays. I look forward to the joy I know they will bring me. And it mainly comes down to having an action plan of Gratitude. Whether it's food or festivities, the extra expenses or the crazy cousins, I keep my eye on what I can have, rather than what I can't have. Yes, honestly, I would rather have pumpkin pie than fruit, but I accept that I have a different plan—and I feel so lucky to be surrounded by an abundance of healthier food choices (I never yet met a host who complained when I volunteered to bring fruit for dessert). I turn my mind from feelings of deprivation, and turn towards the joy of the moment. We

hear a lot about remembering the Reason for the Season—and that's not a religious thing, it's spiritual. The reason for our get-togethers isn't food, it's the joy of being together. My to-do list isn't about how much I can get done, but about how I can be in the moment, and find the love. My father used to drive me crazy on his visits, but I tried to focus on how lucky I was to still have a father. Now that he's gone, I could cry over his absence, but I call my sister and we laugh about what a nut he was!

Taking a deep breath, and listening for my Higher Power, remembering all that is good and wonderful in my life quiets the voices of resentment and anxiety that draw me to the food. I can't wait for the holidays, because I know I'll be filled, not with pie, but with the happiness that comes from within. - Martin M.

7th Tradition Donations

We are fully self-supporting through our own contributions declining outside donations

60% WUIG
PO Box 125
White Plains, NY 10603
OAHelps.org
Tel: 914.633.2988

30% OA World Service Office
PO Box 44020
Rio Rancho, NM 87174
OA.org
Tel: 505.891.2664

10% OA Region 6
Region 6 Treasurer
P.O.Box 644
Peabody, Mass 01960
OARegion6.org

For increased security you are encouraged to make online donations to Region 6 via paypal

CALL 5 TO STAY ALIVE

OA's population is shrinking and our meetings are getting smaller. One way to reach out to the struggling compulsive eater is to make phone calls. Go through the WeCARE Books at your meetings and find names of people you haven't seen in a while; CALL THEM. Let them know that they are in your thoughts and that OA welcomes all, regardless of where they are on their road to recovery. This is a simple way to let fellows know that you care, and it helps your recovery too. If you are also interested in doing outreach by working on the 12th Step Within Committee, contact Diana C.

December 31 – OA For Today
The Means by which certain pleasures are gained bring pains many times greater than the pleasures.
- Epicurus

The is no telling what price I may have to pay for breaking my abstinence "just this once." It could be nothing at all, or a trip back to the pits of compulsive overeating.

But the truth is, I do not have to take that chance. It is irrational to feel guilty about refusing food and drink I don't want. If absolutely pushed to the wall, I can say, "I'm sorry, it doesn't agree with me." Which is all too true.

I have already paid dearly for the "pleasures" of compulsive overeating. Then, when I could no longer pay the price, I surrendered, admitted my powerlessness and turned myself over to the Power that still directs my life.

For Today: No holiday dinner, no party, no celebration can persuade me to give up the freedom I enjoy as long as I am abstinent.

Celebrate The Holiday, Not The Food

At Christmas, I focus on small gifts for others, taking photos and what the holiday means -- kindness. At Thanksgiving, it's gratitude. At Halloween it's about the children, the costumes and the fun. I focus on being social with everyone there.

From the WUIG Chair:

The holidays are such a busy time for everyone, and they've been such a wonderful experience for me with the gift of abstinence! The chaos and frenzy of shopping for food and gifts—the crowds, the traffic, the parking—the insanity of it all, has morphed into a Picasso painting that can be enjoyed “as the result of these Steps” (emphasis mine). Abstinence gives me the ability to be present for people and relationships in my life during the holiday season rather than living with my nose buried in the food, focused on looking for the next bite.

Tradition Three tells us that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively; we don't need to do anything else to call ourselves members of OA. The October 12th reading in For Today talks about this, and how “nothing is mandatory” in OA. We are each free to do what works (or what doesn't). The reading does say that “Attendance at meetings, however, is a minimal commitment each of us makes to ourselves. If we can do nothing else, we can go to a meeting. For Today: The first criterion of usefulness in OA is a member's presence at meetings.”

The best way for me to get out of myself

I find out in advance what food will be served and I plan my food. I ask the host/ess if I may bring a dish (that will help my abstinence). This is often raw veggies and dip, such as hummus, salsa, guacamole or a fruit salad. If necessary, I have said, “I'm following a special food plan. Would you mind if I bring my own food?”

My primary focus is service. Any moment during the holiday celebration when I feel uncomfortable - meaning restless, irritable or discontented - I seek any av-

enue possible to do service. This could be washing dishes, entertaining the children, talking with others who are by themselves, engaging with family by asking them about themselves. One year I provided support to a new mother, for which she was extremely grateful.

In short, I make sure my food needs are met and then I put the focus everywhere else, especially on service to others, as my HP guides me to do.

- Carol G



so that I don't focus on food during this holiday season is to get to more meetings, as absurd as that sounds during such a busy time. I can always find a reason to not go to a meeting (it's raining, I have a headache, it's a holiday, I'm tired, there will be enough people there...they don't need me, it's not my favorite meeting). It's more important for me to be useful—and get to that meeting—because my very life as an ex-compulsive overeater “depend[s] upon [my] constant thought of others and how [I] may help meet their needs.” (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 20) That's just Bill W's way of saying that I'm useful.

Happy Holidays and I hope to see you in a meeting!

WE NEED YOUR VOICE!

The Serenity Times needs your service. It is written by local members for local members.

The theme for the next issue is: *Childhood to Now: How OA has allowed me accept my past and grow from it.* Submissions are due by January 1. Work Step 12 and the tool of writing and share your experience. We welcome poems, stories, lists, anything!

Send all submissions to
wuignewsletter@gmail.com
Thank you!

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How I Stay Abstinent Through The Holidays

It is no coincidence that I was asked to write something for this particular month's newsletter. While I have had the gift of abstinent holidays for some time now; the holidays as a child when I began compulsively overeating were some of the worst times I remember with my disease. I have vivid memories of eating myself sick at almost every holiday meal. I remember not being able to breathe and wanting nothing but for my stomach to calm itself down and feel normal again. Many times, as so many of us have experienced, as soon as it did, I ate again. I also remember waking up the next morning with my first thought being "yay, leftovers."

As part of a practicing Jewish family, it was not just a few times a year that these feasts were my adversary. With a weekly Sabbath meal, there was consistent celebratory food. While Friday night dinner paled in comparison to a holiday meal, it was another time to practice religious observance with food.

As an adult, I have had the honor of taking on the hosting of the holidays and continuing our family traditions. In marrying a clergy person, holidays have come to develop even greater meaning which is also a direct result of my recovery work. Today, I am ever the host and the busyness of serving my guests, along with the pride I feel in the healthy and beautiful meals that I have cooked, truly keep me from overeating. Without fail, someone always calls from the dining room table "can we make you a plate?" And always I say "no thank you, I will take care of myself when I get there." No coincidence in the words: it truly is an act of self-care. The hosting helps and I always commit a specific holiday meal earlier in the day. I put down ev-

erything that is at that meal, as often there are things that I don't eat much the rest of the year. I also commit to one plate, which is so crucial for me and helps so much to safely boundary my amount.

If we receive the gift of an invitation and we spend a holiday with others or celebrate a holiday outside of our faith with another family, similar practices apply. I find out what is being served ahead of time, I commit to a specific plan and when I am most willing, I include amounts.

I also would like to offer that the spiritual and deeper meaning of all these holidays, within or outside of my own faith, has the capacity to draw my attention to something bigger than me and my disease.

Even for those of us who do not find real spirituality at family meals and gatherings, there is always an opportunity for service: hold the baby, scrub a pot, be curious about what's going on in someone else's life and practice listening. Even when there is conflict or discomfort, we can practice sending the positive energy of our recovery to those who don't have the benefit of their own. In our best and most surrendered places, there is the opportunity to see those times as a place to strengthen our own program and practice our tools and principles.

I have also texted many times from a holiday meal when I was having a hard time and I often schedule a meeting right after so that I will have a place to unpack anything that I need to from the experience.

In writing this, I am deeply grateful to reflect that it has truly been a very very long time since I have had to suffer at a holiday meal, either with feeling deprived or hating myself for what I've picked up. I wish the same for all of us.

- Nicole, Goldens Bridge

The Day After The Holiday

Making it through a holiday is not so tough for me anymore. I usually host the holiday at my house, so I make sure that there are plenty of healthy, abstinent options. I cook the protein, multiple vegetables and a carb I can eat. I plan the meal in advance and give my food away to my sponsor. I'm even pretty good at making a plan to connect with others during the day and do service. I spend a lot of time and thought working to get through the holiday abstintently.

But what I don't prepare for is the next day. The day after the holiday is usually a big blank canvas. I'm off from work and have 14-16 hours to fill. I have had emotions running high from interacting with my family, as well as all the issues and character defects that brings up. Sometimes I have an emotional hangover. I also have a ton of leftovers.

This can be a recipe for disaster. My brain left with big stretches of time and nothing to do often starts believing it is hungry. I can start counting down the minutes between meals. I can get triggered to want something crunchy because I'm angry, or something soft because it's comforting.

So, this year it's going to be different. I am going to work with my sponsor to plan for the day after. I am going to make a list of people in program to contact. I am going to write about my feelings. I will read my daily readings and pray and meditate. I will plan to get out of the house, and not to shop in crazy day-after-the-holiday sales. What's great about program is once you know the traps, you can create an action plan to avoid them. - Megan

