

KNOW! TO CREATE HEALTHY HOLIDAY HABITS

NOVEMBER, 2025



Here are some practical ways to help create a more supportive holiday environment:

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR LANGUAGE

Talking about food and bodies can be stressful for people dealing with eating disorders. Phrases like “I ate too much,” “I feel fat,” or “I’ll have to go on a diet after this” might seem harmless, but they can be triggering. Try to steer conversations away from dieting and weight talk. It can be uncomfortable, but by changing the subject or redirecting the conversation, you can help set a new, healthier tone for your family and friends.

CHOOSE COMPLIMENTS CAREFULLY

It’s natural to want to say, “You look great!” when you see loved ones, but even well-meaning compliments about appearance can be harmful for someone with an active eating disorder or in recovery. No matter how well-intended, comments like “Have you lost weight?” or “You look so healthy!” can unintentionally reinforce unhealthy behaviors.

Instead, focus on qualities that matter more, like kindness, creativity, or the joy someone brings into your life. Try saying things like, “I always feel better after talking to you.”, or “Being around you makes the holidays brighter.” You might even find that these types of compliments are more meaningful to you and the person you are complimenting.

The holidays can be joyful, but they can also bring stress for many people. While festive foods and special meals are highlights of the season for some, they can be a source of stress, anxiety, or emotional strain for anyone struggling with an eating disorder or negative body image.

According to the National Eating Disorders Association, about 9% of people in the U.S. will experience an eating disorder at some point in their lives. Eating disorders affect people of all genders, ages, races, body sizes, and backgrounds. You may already know someone who has struggled, or there may be people in your life who are struggling silently.

Even if you’re not aware of anyone specific, you can make the holiday season more supportive for everyone by being mindful of language and behaviors that reinforce diet culture or weight stigma. Because these messages are so ingrained in our society, it’s easy to miss how they show up in our daily conversations and traditions. Weight stigma is linked to depression, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction, and young people who diet are more likely to develop an eating disorder than those who don’t. The good news is that small changes in how we talk and act can make a big difference.

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DON'T MAKE EVERYTHING ABOUT FOOD

Food is often a big part of holiday traditions, but it doesn't have to be the only focus. Planning activities and creating new holiday traditions that aren't centered on eating, like making holiday crafts, playing games, or watching a favorite movie, are great ways to make everyone feel included and reduce stress for those who find mealtimes difficult.

MODEL HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

Young people notice how adults talk about food and their bodies. Show them what it looks like to appreciate yourself based on who you are, rather than how you look. Avoid saying things like "I was good today because I didn't eat much" or "I need to earn this meal." Instead, practice balanced, consistent eating habits and speak kindly about your body. These behaviors help create a sense of safety and ease anxiety around food.

OFFER SUPPORT

If you know someone who's struggling, let them know that you care. Ask how you can help them cope with the holidays and help them plan ahead of time for situations that might feel overwhelming. Let them know that you're there to listen to and support them.

TAKE CONCERNS SERIOUSLY

If you do notice the warning signs of an eating disorder, like skipping meals, making excuses for not eating, focusing obsessively on healthy eating, or extreme dieting or exercise, take them seriously. Address your concerns gently and privately. Use caring "I" statements such as, "I've noticed you seem uncomfortable around meals lately, and I'm worried about you."

Your loved one might not be ready to talk right away, and that's okay. Let them know you're there when they are. If you're concerned, reach out to a pediatrician or eating disorder specialist. Early intervention can make a real difference.

SOURCES

- [Eating Disorders and the Holidays | Change Creates Change](#)
- [Eating Disorders and the Holidays: Helping Loved Ones Cope | University of Rochester Medical Center](#)
- [Eating Disorder Statistics | National Eating Disorders Association \(NEDA\)](#)
- [Compliments and Eating Disorders | National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders](#)
- [Body Image and Children | National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders](#)
- [6 Tips to Get Through Thanksgiving When You're Struggling with an Eating Disorder | Center for Discovery](#)
- [Body Image and Eating Disorders | NEDA](#)

RESOURCES

- [Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741](#)
- [Treatment Directory | NEDA](#)
- [Eating Disorder Resources | Eating Recovery Center](#)
- [Parent Toolkit | National Eating Disorders Association](#)
- [Grace Holland Cozine Resource Center | NEDA](#)

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