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The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

How to Resist the Urge to Binge Eat Over the Holidays

Use mindfulness to experience joy and stop obsessing about food

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This post was written by Gia Marson, Ed.D.

*a change in environment can help , a change in
mindset can heal - yung pueblo*



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For many of us, as the pandemic tightens its grip on our daily lives, the festive rituals you've come to enjoy may no longer be possible. You may not be able to see loved ones. Your usual activities may be re-

stricted by stay-at-home orders. You might be worried about becoming infected or infecting someone. Traveling, gathering, sharing meals, exchanging gifts—all of it may be up in the air.

Not knowing how, or even whether, we'll celebrate this year is causing many of us to experience more anxiety than ever. This is especially concerning for those with eating disorders. Binge eating disorder, by far the most common eating disorder, impacts millions regardless of gender. One recent study shows that disruptions in daily living due to COVID-19 and heightened uncertainty about our physical health, finances, social life, and mental health may contribute to an increase in binge eating urges and behaviors.

and anxiety are the most common emotional triggers in binge eating. Fortunately, mindfulness practices can help you now and in the moment to reckon with uncomfortable feelings, avoid bingeing urges, and make intentional food choices.

Another recent study shows that, in a university setting, mindful eating is inversely related to binge eating behaviors. That is, the more mindful the students who participated in the study were in their eating, the lower they scored on the binge eating measure. When we consider the higher risk for binge eating behaviors in this time of uncertainty and the inverse relationship between mindfulness and binge eating behaviors, applying mindfulness skills to eating makes good sense.

Mindfulness of intentional choices

Between a challenging event (an urge) and your response (to binge eat), there is a powerful space of opportunity. Use this space to wisely choose what to do. Here's how:

- **Observe:** Notice difficult situations, obsessive food thoughts, and times when you're feeling upset. These are your triggers.

as if on autopilot. Slow down your thinking and deepen your breathing by: inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. Create the mental space to consider your options and their realistic consequences.

- **Transform:** Take one intentional step at a time. Choose the actions on the path that will lead you to true joy. Even small conscious changes can reduce experiences of shame and increase positive emotions.

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Let's look at two distinctly different ways this might play out if you're obsessing about food or feeling distressed, then triggered, during this unique holiday season.

1. An urge-driven reaction

about food. You automatically react by starting to plan. An immediate sense of relief comes over you as you begin to use the fantasy of eating and food itself as a way to cope with or escape a negative situation or emotion, or even as a distraction. While consumed by the ritual of the binge eating cycle, you may miss or minimize signs of negative consequences. However, when the binge eating episode is over or by the next morning, you experience a downward spiral of physical discomfort, plus feelings of disgust and shame.

2. An intentional, mindful response:

You notice that you're experiencing a difficult situation, obsessive food thoughts, and that an urge to binge eat is rising up. You pause and check in with your body. You observe that you're sad, not hungry. You ask yourself what you really need to soothe, distract, or comfort you from the situation and related thoughts and emotions. While obsessing about food and binge eating might offer you moments of temporary relief, you know from experience that the shame that follows will add another reason to be upset, and you do not want to make matters worse. As an act of self-care, you make an intentional, helpful plan to get through the next 10, 30, or even

game. Even still, you notice that the urge to binge eat intensifies, and you experience it without judgment and return your attention to your chosen activity. In this moment, your thinking slows and calms. Eventually, the urge is gone, like a giant wave that has receded after crashing to shore. You feel empowered because you took positive control and joyful because you interrupted the negative binge eating spiral.

This holiday season, remember that change is possible when you're willing to try something new. When you experience an urge to binge eat, stay present in the moment and notice the space you have to pause rather than rushing in with an urge-driven behavior. What you choose to do in the moments that follow a distressing event or urge can take your life in vastly different directions.

You can cultivate joy - when you observe, accept, pause, and transform - in response to triggers. Even during holidays that emphasize food, you no longer have to feel powerless in the face of difficult emotions or obsessive food thoughts. Instead, pivot to take active steps toward joy. You'll feel empowered and boost your sense of well-being.

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