NEDA
Feeding hope.
National Eating Disorders Association

A HOLIDAY GREETING FROM NEDA CEO/PRESIDENT, LYNN GREFE

The holidays can be both a joyous and a challenging time for individuals struggling with an eating disorder and their families. Every year, NEDA sees a spike in calls to the Helpline during the holiday season. But, we also hear stories of recovery and hope every year from individuals and their families.

We've created this special holiday issue of *Making Connections* to address both sides of the seasonal coin. In it, you will find tips and strategies on how to navigate the stresses that can often accompany the holidays. You will also find uplifting stories, as well as updates on NEDA's 2014 successes.

For the third year in a row, NEDA was honored to have the Empire State Building lit in blue and green for NEDAwareness Week. Thanks to generous donations, NEDA also had the opportunity to share our message with the public on enormous billboards in Times Square.

The month of September brought a legislative victory for eating disorders in the state of New York. In October, families and professionals joined together in San Antonio, TX for the annual NEDA Conference, where they learned from each other and worked to advance the fight against eating disorders.

Mary Lambert, the Grammy award winning singer, performed at NEDA's annual benefit; and NEDA Walks across the country broke records for participation and fundraising thanks to our many volunteers and NEDA Network Members. These are just a few of the highlights at NEDA in 2014.

We hope that you and your family had many happy victories of your own this year. Recovery isn't always easy, but it's a victory of its own for everyone affected by these challenging disorders. We at NEDA are honored to be a part of your community and to help you and yours find joy this holiday season – and every season year-round!

Happy holidays and all the best in the New Year!

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WITH 2014 COMING TO A CLOSE, WE ARE THANKFUL FOR SO MANY GREAT MEMORIES

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1. A family comes together at a NEDA Walk | 2. NEDA Staff pose for our annual holiday picture. Not pictured: Andrew, Ashley, Liz, Maggi, Rachel, Yasemin | 3. Researchers and clinicians are awarded funds via NEDA's Feeding Hope Fund for Clinical Research and Training | 4. Members of the Family Panel gather at the 2014 NEDA Conference | 5. The Empire State Building lights the way in the fight against eating disorders in honor of NEDAwareness Week on Tuesday, February 25, 2014 | 6. Grammy award-winning artist, Mary Lambert, performs at the 2014 NEDA Annual Benefit Dinner

12 IDEAS TO HELP PEOPLE WITH EATING DISORDERS NEGOTIATE THE HOLIDAY SEASON

By Michael E. Barrett, PhD

1 **Eat regularly and in some kind of reasonable pattern.** Avoid "preparing for the last supper." Don't skip meals and restrict your food intake in an attempt to make up for what you recently ate or are about to eat. Keep a regular and moderate eating pattern.

2 **Worry more about the size of your heart than the size of your hips!** It is the holiday season, a great time to reflect, enjoy relationships with loved ones, and most importantly, a time to feel gratitude for blessings received and to give back through loving service to others.

3 **Discuss your anticipation of the holidays with your therapist, physician, dietitian, or other members of your treatment team** so that they can help you predict, prepare for, and get through any uncomfortable family interactions without self-destructive coping attempts. Alert them ahead of time; let them know of your concerns, needs, and the possibility of you calling them for emotional support.

4 **Have a well-thought-out game plan before you go home or invite others into your home.** Know "where the exits are," where your support people are, and how you'll recognize when it's time to make a quick exit and get connected with needed support.

5 **Talk with loved ones about important issues: decisions, victories, challenges, fears, concerns, dreams, goals, special moments, spirituality, relationships and your feelings about them.** Allow important themes to be present. Allow yourself to have fun rather than rigidly focusing on food or body concerns.

6 **Think of someone to call if you are struggling with addictive behaviors, or with negative thoughts or difficult emotions.**

7 **Consider choosing one loved one to be your "reality check" with food**, to either help fix a plate for you or to give you sound feedback on the food portion sizes you make for yourself.

8 **Write down your vision of where you would like your mind and heart to be during this holiday time with loved ones.** Take time, several times per day, to find a quiet place to get in tune with your vision, to remember, to nurture, and to center yourself in the thoughts, feelings, and actions that match your vision for yourself.

9 **Focus your personal goals for your time with loved ones during the holidays.** Make them about "doing something" rather than about trying to prevent something. It's fine to have food goals, but make sure you add personal, emotional, spiritual, and relationship goals as well.

10 **Work on being flexible in your thoughts.** Learn to be flexible when setting guidelines for yourself and expectations of yourself and others. Strive to be flexible in what you can eat during the holidays. Take a holiday from self-imposed criticism, rigidity, and perfectionism.

THINK OF SOMEONE TO CALL

if you are struggling with addictive behaviors, or with negative thoughts or difficult emotions.

11 **Stay active in your support group, or join one if you are not currently involved.** Many support groups can be helpful: 12-step groups, co-dependence groups, eating disorder therapy groups, book clubs, neighborhood game groups, and religious or spiritually oriented groups are examples of groups that may give real support. Isolation and withdrawal from positive support are not the way to get through trying times.

12 **Avoid "overstressing" and "overbooking" yourself.** A lower sense of stress can decrease the perceived need to turn to eating-disordered behaviors or other unhelpful coping strategies. Cut down on unnecessary events and obligations and leave time for relaxation, contemplation, reflection, spiritual renewal, simple service, and enjoying the small yet most important things in life. This will help you experience and enjoy a sense of gratitude and peace.

AROUND THE TABLE

The Ghosts of Eating Disorders...

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

NANCY, MOM

When Emily and Ashtyn were first diagnosed with eating disorders (ED), any meal time was stress inducing. In fact, even grocery shopping seemed to trigger a stress response for all of us. Thanksgiving, a holiday that centers on food, was certainly even more of a challenge. Not only was the food issue an overriding stress, but sharing a meal with other family members who didn't understand the intricacies of eating disorders was difficult to navigate. Early on, it seemed for Thanksgiving and Christmas more time was spent on trying to figure how to work around our daughters' eating disorders. There were several years in a row in which Christmas had to be celebrated at treatment facilities. The most heartbreaking Christmas was one

where we had to bring our daughter back to the treatment facility Christmas evening. I remember much crying and heartbreak because we couldn't just be together and reminisce about Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

As we have cycled through years of recovery and relapse, ED has lost its hold on our daughters and slowly has been extinguished from our lives. After nine years of treatment and therapy, our family has reclaimed the warmth and closeness of our Thanksgiving and Christmas traditions.

EMILY, 24

My first holiday season with my eating disorder was one filled with anxiety and dread. To get through each family meal and celebration, I needed to have a coaching session with my therapist (bless her heart!).

She helped me see that it was important that I didn't skip meals in order to "save up" for the celebration meal. Eating throughout the day, made the holidays just like any other day, thus making the holidays more enjoyable.

Also, knowing that I had my family's unconditional love and support definitely

helped me through the difficult holiday season.

Several holiday seasons were spent in treatment facilities, but served as motivation for me. I realized that the holiday season only happens once a year and I did not want to spend such a loving, joyous time in a hospital.

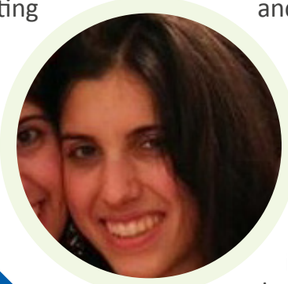
Now, 7 years in recovery, I don't dread the holidays, I look forward to them. "Now pass the mashed potatoes!"

ASHTYN, 24

For a holiday that centers itself around a feast, it can get pretty overwhelming. But I know that I can get up, take a breather, call my therapist or dietician and leave a message, or utilize another skill that I've learned during my journey towards recovery.

This year will be one of the first holiday seasons in a long time where I - *Ashtyn*- am at the table, around the Christmas tree, singing at Church…and *not* my eating disorder. There will be no compensating and "saving up" for the feast; there will be no forced eating.

Instead, there will be



time spent with family, decorating, and recovering from my law school finals. Sure, there will likely be some challenging thoughts and feelings during the course of the holiday season - I don't expect those to go away any time soon.

But I am taking it one step at a time and using the tools I have learned in treatment to deal with anything that comes up. Plus, I know I have a great support system around me.

The battle isn't over, but I've made it to the other side.

GERALD, DAD

This coming Holiday Season will be especially wonderful for me as a father. It will mark the first time, in a long time, that I will have my family intact since our battle with ED. Intact, in our home, decorating, sharing, and just enjoying each other, as well as, all the things associated with a family holiday tradition.

Since the departure of ED, gone are the holidays spent in treatment centers and hotel rooms in different cities and the abrupt endings to holidays cut short to race back to treatment by curfew. Gone are the tears on that lonely drive home, knowing that I was returning to an empty home on a holiday night and my daughters were in treatment.

Holidays are about being thankful and spending time with your loved ones; ED has stolen much of them from me. However, this year I can honestly say that I am looking forward to rekindling those precious moments associated with holidays and charting new courses as we embark on a life free from ED.

ED will not have a place set at our table for this holiday season… AND AMEN TO THAT!

5 WAYS TO SURVIVE & THRIVE THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS WHEN YOU HAVE AN EATING DISORDER

By August McLaughlin

Food, family gatherings and thankfulness are centerpieces of many Americans' holidays—often in that order. These very traits commonly deemed attributes are precisely what make the food-centric season challenging when you have an eating disorder, which can make festive food displays daunting and the company of others intimidating

Whether you've struggled with disordered eating for months, years or decades, there are ways to not only survive but thrive during the holidays. The following tips derive from courageous people who know firsthand what it's like to accomplish the seemingly improbable: not allowing an eating disorder to zap the joy and ease from the holiday season. While the suggestions vary in specifics, they share a common thread worth adding to your holiday to-do list: prioritizing self-care.

Know that you're not alone—not really.

The contrast of lively festivities and your inner-struggle can prompt loneliness, but it doesn't have to. "It might sound silly," said Kelly M., a psychology major at the University of California, Berkley, "but just knowing that there are so many others out there dealing with these issues helps me feel less alone and even a little courageous." She said that rather than simply eating for herself, she imagines she's taking bites for others enduring similar struggles. "If I can do it," she encourages others, "you can, too."

Confide in a supportive loved one.

There is little that makes personal battles more difficult than bottling them up inside. To preempt such angst, Mariana J., a stay-at-home mom in Richfield, Minnesota, discusses her feelings with a girlfriend before holiday meals. "We go for a walk together and she just listens and encourages me," she said. "Then if I have a freakout moment during a get-together, I text her an SOS." Doing so eases tension, she said, turning sadness into inspiration and, often, laughter.

Know and honor your limits.

"I had to learn that self-care sometimes means bowing out of an activity," said Jill F., a high school teacher in Los Angeles. "Nowadays, I can go most anywhere and feel un-phased, but for years, I said 'no' to gatherings I knew I couldn't handle and made alternate plans to see the attendees." If saying 'no' means saying 'yes' to your well-being, give yourself permission to do so. If you're on the fence regarding a situation, discuss your dilemma with your therapist or a loved one who holds your best interests at heart.

Challenge yourself, baby-step style.

Holing yourself up alone to avoid food excesses or emotional triggers can be tempting during the holidays, but you won't likely heal or grow if you don't challenge yourself at all. Consider small, gentle challenges, says Riyanna M., a Seattle-based clinical psychologist who overcame an eating disorder in her youth. "If a huge party seems scary, host a smaller-scale event with foods you feel comfortable around," she said, "or make a point of enjoying a portion of a food you love but normally won't allow yourself." You'll know whether a step is ideal, she explained, if it seems more doable and appealing than intimidating.

Focus where it counts.

Saying, "Don't think about food or your eating disorder!" is a bit like telling someone standing in a blizzard to ignore the cold. That said, you can make efforts to focus on the aspects of the holiday season you find beautiful. When I was struggling with anorexia, I found that seeking opportunities to help others with tasks, such as wrapping gifts or running errands, shifted my moods toward the positive. Similar benefits derived from keeping a gratitude journal. It's important to remember that no matter how dark your world may feel at times, there is brightness to behold. The more you embrace it, the more you'll likely draw in.

GRATITUDE: A GIFT TO YOURSELF

By Carolyn Jennings

Our country has set aside holidays for giving thanks, exchanging gifts, bringing light to a dark time of year. I cherish these ideals. But the actual experiences of the winter holidays often revolve more around food and complicated relationships, busyness and loneliness. Gratitude can seem far away.

I've found that practicing gratitude can open the door to celebrations of the heart. It shifts my focus from what's problematic to what's good. It uplifts my negative tendencies, softens my harsh edges, invites my spirit to come out and play. With gratitude coursing through my veins, even what's problematic seems more possible.

Here's a fresh way I've found to practice gratitude, a List of 100. Just as it sounds, a List of 100 is a list made up of 100 items. I've made lists on many topics in recovery, but during the holidays I like to write 100 things I'm grateful for. I think you might enjoy the process too.

Here's how to start:

Number your entries. You don't have to write in complete sentences, just let go and write as fast as you can. Don't get intimidated—repeating items is not only OK, it's an integral part of the process. In your list, be sure to include all of the things that you are grateful for about yourself: qualities and values, things you've done for yourself, things you've done for others.

When you've reached item #100, read the list. What does it inspire in you? Is there someone you'd like to call and thank for what they've done for you? Are you sparked to pay a gift forward, pass it along in some creative way? Maybe you can sprinkle in some of your list's feel-good activities and practices, people and places into your holiday season.

Article continues on next page...

"Gratitude: A Gift For Yourself" continued...

Gratitude is a gift that begs to be shared.

I recall that holidays early in my recovery could be tender and tough times. I wasn't the same person doing the same things as I had been in prior years for prior holidays. But I didn't quite know how to acknowledge or incorporate the new me into the old holidays. Focusing on gratitude can reveal more about who and how you are now and how many gifts your life holds. If you're helping a friend or family member through disease and recovery, writing your own list can reconnect you with the goodness and love underneath uncertainty or tenderness.

Use gratitude as a guide for getting through the holidays in the most authentic, self-loving way.

For me, there is a quote that I live by. Zen Guide Cheri Huber often says, "The quality of your life is determined only by the focus of your attention." When I focus on all of the good things in life, I step out of the bleak eyes of my disease and into the truth of abundance.

With this focus, every day glitters a bit more, every day holds a little more of the holiday spirit of light, connection and thanks.

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Feeding hope.
National Eating Disorders Association

165 W. 46th Street, Suite 402
New York, NY 10036
(212) 575-6200
www.myneda.org
info@myneda.org