

# CONNECTION

EATING DISORDER RECOVERY HAPPENS THROUGH CONNECTION

## HOLIDAYS ARE CHALLENGING FOR THOSE WITH EATING DISORDERS

**Individuals with eating disorders often perceive certain food as bad, intolerable, scary, a thing to avoid. Yet holiday events typically revolve around food and family.**

These celebrations with family and special friends almost always involve FOOD as the centerpiece. The foods and traditions may vary from region to region and from culture to culture, but holidays focus on special foods.

That's why at Esperanza, patients are given the opportunities to practice for holidays. The treatment focus is to help reduce stress and eating disordered thoughts and behaviors associated with these events. This practice is an important part of Esperanza's *Recovery by Doing* philosophy.

At Esperanza EDC, we start holiday practice in October with a therapeutic treatment approach called exposure and response prevention. Patients are exposed to their feared foods, and they learn to prevent the overeating or avoiding behaviors.

The "holiday season" gets started in the fall with Halloween, the "candy" holiday. Candy makes this holiday very scary for someone with an eating disorder. There is fear of overeating, or there may be excessive attention paid to avoiding any event associated with candy all together.

An individual who overeats may buy candy in advance, graze on it, then need to purchase more by the time Halloween arrives. No conventional diet allows candy. It is the ultimate forbidden food, which makes it all-the-more desirable for those with emotional overeating. An individual with anorexia may completely avoid the forbidden sweets present during Halloween. We practice eating Halloween candy in moderation so that on Halloween, patients can enjoy the holiday and eat the tasty candy in moderation.

The "food" holiday we observe next is Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the most stressful holiday of the year for someone with an eating disorder. The entire day revolves around one meal that is comprised of foods that you only eat once a year and as Americans, we give ourselves permission to overeat or sometimes binge on this delicious meal. However, someone with anorexia may withdraw or avoid eating at all.

At Esperanza for Thanksgiving, we prepare a full meal for a "Practice Thanksgiving." Patients learn to eat three meals throughout the day, one of which is the Thanksgiving meal that is plated according to their meal plan.

Someone with anorexia can learn that one holiday meal is not going to effect their weight. Someone with bulimia can learn how to eat foods they are afraid they will overeat. Someone with binge eating disorder can learn to allow themselves to eat the food during the special meal while not skipping other meals during the day or not overeating.

With practice, all holidays can be events where fear of food is replaced with a focus on the celebrating, the relationships, and the joy of the day.

**Connect with Dessimber Daniels at (210) 253-9763 for a telephone screening, insurance benefits review and to schedule a comprehensive, in-person assessment.**

[www.EsperanzaEDC.com](http://www.EsperanzaEDC.com)

