Approach Guide

Observing

JEWISH HOLIDAYS

when you have an eating disorder

www.ANAD.org
Recovering from an eating disorder is a complex process.

For many Jewish people with eating disorders, the process has the additional challenge of integrating recovery work and practices such as keeping Shabbos and kashrut.

In this guide, we offer some advice to help your recovery journey.

A special thanks to Amani Joseph and Karin Eli for their collaboration.
Shabbos meals can be an important part of connecting with family and community but we recognize they can also be stressful. There are several ways to reduce stress around these meals.

When you're eating at home, try and help (if clinically approved) to cook and prepare dishes, if that’s something you enjoy.

You can also try to help plan meals in advance or think about what you might choose if you’re eating outside your home (if clinically approved and if it doesn’t cause you stress).

If possible, working with your treatment team to plan food exchanges in advance of Shabbos meals can be very helpful. Let your treatment team know what foods are typically served at your Shabbos table and think together about how these match with your meal plan.
In addition to thinking together about the content of the meals, talk to your treatment team about how to cope with other challenges that might arise during Shabbos meals. For example, what to do if someone makes a comment about eating or appearance, or what to do if there’s a trigger food being served.

Planning coping strategies ahead of time can help you navigate Shabbos meals successfully and even enjoy them.

For those who are Shomer Shabbos (Shabbos observant), keeping contact with your treatment team may be paused for the duration of Shabbos and Yom Tov. Work together with your treatment team to plan creative ways for coping over Shabbos and Yom Tov.

For example, you can work with your treatment team in advance to create puzzles and games that utilize coping skills and therapy tips that can be reviewed over Shabbos and Yom Tov.
You can also write together flashcards with encouraging messages and positive affirmations that support your recovery. These flashcards can be powerful reminders of the recovery work you’ve been doing, and of the people who support your recovery journey.

In addition, if you’re part of a peer support program, it may be possible to ask your peers to exchange brief messages of support and encouragement, which you can print out and read over Shabbos and Yom Tov. Your team may also be able to offer books that promote recovery.

Please remember that eating disorders are serious medical conditions; if you find it very difficult to cope and you’re distressed, it is important to prioritize Piku’ach Nefesh.
Eating disorder treatment brings new routines into your life, specifically surrounding food and eating (but not just). As part of this, you may need to consider how your religious practices - for example, kashrut, davening, saying blessings over food, and Jewish learning - work within the new treatment routine.

Discuss this openly with your treatment team. Let them know what’s important to you, and work together with them to develop a plan that will ensure you are fully engaged in treatment while continuing to pursue Jewish practices that are important to you.

In residential programs, incorporating religious practice into the program’s daily schedule may be challenging. Some programs are designed with Jewish clients in mind, but others are not. Again, it is important to speak openly with your treatment team about this, and establish a plan that will acknowledge your religious practice needs within the treatment program schedule.
Mental Health Resources

JEWISH MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES
A list of Jewish mental health resources offering a range of services and support options.

ANAD HOLIDAY HELP GUIDE
This guide shares tips and ideas from our support group leaders and resources offered by our friends and partners.

PROJECT HEAL
Project Heal aims to help individuals with eating disorders surmount the financial and systemic barriers to treatment.

NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR EATING DISORDERS
The Alliance provides education, referrals, and support for all individuals experiencing eating disorders, as well as their loved ones.

FEAST
FEAST provides global support for friends & family members of those who have eating disorders.

CRISIS TEXT LINE
If you experience a mental health crisis during the holidays, Text HOME to 741741
If you're able, please consider donating to ANAD to keep our services free and accessible.