

Nitschke Center: Holiday Stress—A Danger for those Facing Addiction

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The holidays are upon us. When you think of the holidays, you undoubtedly think of it as a special time of year, spent with family and friends. But for some, it can be a difficult time of year particularly when facing a drug or alcohol addiction.

“The stress of the holidays is often very tough for those facing substance abuse issues,” said Tina Marie Baeten, Clinical Supervisor at the [Jackie Nitschke Center](#). “Getting together with family and friends can actually trigger a new round of drinking or drug use, or even a relapse for those in recovery.”

Baeten adds that “Alcohol is often part of many holiday celebrations, so it’s important not to get caught off guard when asked if you’d like a drink. Before you head to such an event, consider going over how you will respond when asked about having a drink.” Some examples of language you can use if you’re in recovery, or you simply don’t want to drink, include:

- A simple but firm “no, thank you.”
- Or say yes by stating, “I’d love a glass of water with lemon (or a diet soda or a cup of coffee).” This is generally enough to quickly end the discussion.
- “I’ll pass as I have an early morning appointment tomorrow.”

But turning down a drink is only a small piece of planning ahead for the holidays. For a safe and happy holiday, Baeten says it’s vital to be aware of triggers and strategies needed to keep anxiety, depression, stress and addiction under control. “Saying no to alcohol is important, but you need to understand what puts you in the position where you may want to drink,” Baeten added. “Sometimes you can avoid those situations or develop coping mechanisms that will help get you through it. It also helps to realize most people won’t think twice about whether or not you’re

drinking.”

Those hosting get-togethers should also consider who will be attending and be sure to:

- Have non-alcoholic beverage options available, like sparkling water with limes or lemons, or soda and coffee.
- Always serve food when serving beverages.
- Have a designated bartender to avoid people over-serving themselves.
- Keep conversations light and about positive things. Don't venture into discussions about controversial subjects or family issues that are likely to make people anxious or angry.

Baeten says it's also important to understand that if things get to be too much, it's time to reach out for help.