

45% Report Increased Desire to Drink or Use Substances During the Holidays, Study Finds

New research from Freeman Recovery Center highlights how grief, loneliness, financial stress, and social pressure shape substance use during the holiday season.

DICKSON, TN, UNITED STATES, December 24, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- While the holiday season is often associated with celebration and togetherness, new research suggests it can also intensify emotional distress and substance use risk for many Americans. A [new study from Freeman Recovery Center](#) found that grief, loneliness, financial stress, and social pressure significantly increase cravings and relapse risk during the holidays, particularly among younger adults and individuals with a history of substance use.

The study found that nearly half of Americans report an increased desire to drink or use substances during the holiday season. Rates were higher among younger adults and those with a substance use history, underscoring how seasonal stressors may compound existing vulnerabilities.

Holiday gatherings themselves often act as emotional triggers. Nearly half of Americans said they feel pressured at least sometimes to drink or use substances at holiday events, while one in four avoid gatherings altogether to escape substance-heavy environments. Among those who do attend, nearly one in three reported using a code word or signal with a trusted person to leave or de-escalate if situations become overwhelming.

Key Findings from the Study:

- 45% reported an increased desire to drink or use substances during the holidays, rising to 51% among Gen Z, 56% among millennials, and 73% among those with a substance use history.
- Half of Americans reported pre-gaming before holiday family gatherings, including 51% who drink alcohol and about one in three who use cannabis, with rates rising to 43% among Gen Z and millennials.
- 73% said the holidays trigger emotions tied to a past loss, while 57% reported experiencing an emotional hangover after holiday events, most commonly among millennials (66%) and Gen Z (60%).

- 74% said they feel lonely at least some of the time during the holidays, and 42% of Gen Z indicated they turn to social media or doomscrolling to cope with holiday loneliness.
- 50% reported using substances to cope with holiday financial stress, including 40% who turn to alcohol and 33% who use cannabis, while two in five adults acknowledged hiding holiday purchases or debt, most often from a partner (28%).
- One in four Americans said they feel pressure to drink or use substances at holiday gatherings, rising to one in three among Gen Z and millennials.
- 23% said they skip holiday gatherings to avoid heavy substance use, and among those who attend, 30% reported using a code word or signal to de-escalate or exit uncomfortable situations.

Emotional strain often begins before celebrations start. At holiday family gatherings, 36% of respondents described themselves as stressed but manageable, while 15% reported feeling overwhelmed or emotionally triggered. Among those with a substance use history, emotional distress was even more pronounced, with fewer than one in five reporting they felt calm and connected during holiday events.

“Nearly three-quarters of Americans report feeling emotionally isolated at this time of year, which highlights how the season can amplify sadness and stress,” Freeman Recovery Center said. “This duality—joy for some and emotional turmoil for others—reinforces the importance of recognizing these feelings, especially for individuals at higher risk of substance misuse. Understanding this dynamic allows for more effective support during a vulnerable period.”

Financial pressure also emerged as a major contributor to substance use during the holidays. Roughly half of Americans reported turning to substances to manage holiday-related money stress, with alcohol and cannabis cited most often. About 40% said they hid holiday purchases or debt from someone close to them.

Despite these challenges, many respondents also reported using protective strategies to manage the holiday season. More than half said they avoided substance-heavy events, while others relied on routines, social connections, or trigger avoidance to stay grounded. Still, the overlap between healthy coping mechanisms and self-medication remained common, particularly among younger adults.

“The holidays can bring both celebration and pressure,” Freeman Recovery Center said. “Seeking help and support can be the difference between facing these challenges alone and finding stability. Recovery is more than abstinence—it’s about connection, joy, and embracing the season while remaining true to your recovery journey.”

Taken together, the findings suggest the holiday season can create a heightened risk

environment, combining emotional strain, normalized substance use, and social expectations. The study underscores the importance of proactive mental health planning, supportive boundaries, and open conversations around emotional well-being during the holidays.

Methodology

Freeman Recovery Center surveyed 1,000 U.S. adults using Pollfish, an online market research platform. The survey examined holiday stress, emotional triggers, coping behaviors, and substance use patterns. Responses were stratified by age, gender, and substance use history. Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

About Freeman Recovery Center

Freeman Recovery Center provides evidence-based treatment for individuals experiencing substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health conditions. Based in Tennessee, the organization offers a continuum of care that includes detoxification, residential treatment, and outpatient services, including an [Intensive Outpatient Program](#) that supports recovery while individuals continue daily responsibilities. Freeman Recovery Center emphasizes individualized care and long-term recovery.

View the full study here:

<https://www.freemanrecoverycenter.com/holiday-substance-use-triggers/>

Taylor Jay

Freeman Recovery Center

pr@growresolve.com

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[TikTok](#)

[X](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/877897528>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2025 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.