

## Healthy Eating for the Holidays is the Best Gift to Give Yourself

It's that time of year again – the holidays. We love them and hate them at the same time. While the “season of giving” can bring us wonderful times with friends and family, they can also drown us in an overabundance of rich foods and sweets. Packing on a few extra pounds isn't unusual during this time of year. Weight gain results not only from excessive eating and drinking, but also from added stress. It's time to de-stress and maintain a healthy weight this holiday season.

Emotional Connections to Food: Holiday eating can be infused with emotional connections that we may not even recognize. For example, consuming sugar releases serotonin, the “feel good” hormone. When the stress resulting from over commitment, financial strain or family demands hits us, we may find ourselves reaching for the holiday goodies to compensate. If we are conscious of the connection between sweets and serotonin, we can help ourselves feel better by naturally increasing our serotonin levels in healthier ways such as going for a walk or having a laugh with a friend.

Keep-up Your Routine: One of the best ways to stay fit and healthy during the holidays is to keep to your exercise routine as much as possible. Be sure to get to bed by 10 p.m. on the nights you're not out celebrating. Get to the gym or do your regular workout. Remember, exercise increases your energy and reduces your cravings. Often times, people throw out their whole routine from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, with the promise to start anew with a New Year's resolution. Bad idea! Heading into the holiday season with that attitude is a recipe for disaster. If you feel fit going into the season, and maintain your schedule as much as possible, your stress levels will decrease, and you'll be able to stay on track and maintain your weight and health goals.

Surviving Holiday Meals: If you're like most of us, it's hard to be surrounded by our favorite foods and not to overindulge. We often tell ourselves that this is the only time of year when we get to eat like this. “It's just once a year, we deserve it!” Do you hear those tempting phrases? If so, remind yourself there is no food shortage. Stuffing yourself won't make you feel good, you'll just feel stuffed. Here are some tips to help you beat the temptations:

- Use a smaller plate or simply make sure to leave some room on your plate
- Take a tiny portion of all that is offered, so you can have a bite of everything
- Eat slowly and savor the taste, the color, and the texture of each bite you take; remember, you don't have to eat it all at once.

Specific foods have sentimental value: Special foods may remind you of your Mom's cooking when you were a child. Take a moment to enjoy the aroma and remember the good memories, without feeling obligated to consume that particular food. Don't worry about offending your host by passing on some dishes. Your company will be enjoyed no matter what or how much you consume.

Limit Your Alcohol: Don't start drinking alcohol until after you've eaten something with protein such as nuts, turkey or cheese. All that sugar on an empty stomach will just spike your blood sugar levels. When your levels plummet, you'll end-up ravenous. Alcohol also quells our inhibitions making it harder to say "no," which often leads us to mindlessly roaming the buffet table consuming larger quantities than planned. Remember to drink water between alcoholic drinks. A non-alcoholic cranberry juice spritzer with lime is a beautiful, healthful and satisfying drink. Also, staying hydrated will help you with any potential residual affects the next morning and will also help you sleep better that night.

Reinvent Special Recipes: When planning your own special holiday meal, choose wisely rather than nostalgically. You don't need to make the green bean casserole and sweet potatoes with the little marshmallows just because that's what you used to eat as a child. There are several updated and healthier versions of classic holiday recipes available.

When Menu-Planning, Cut-Out Non-Essentials: While some foods are "must-haves", others are less essential. Keep your meals simple and cut-out the foods which are not absolutely needed. When you look at a table that has mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes and biscuits, it evokes a feeling of over kill. Consider choosing the healthier option of sweet potatoes and pass on the others. You'll still feel full and satisfied at the end of the meal. Keep in mind that 2,000 calories is the average daily intake. So, a typical holiday meal with turkey, stuffing and all the trimmings (excluding dessert) runs about 1,500 calories.

Pay Attention to Your Body: Check-in with your stomach during your meal. Are you still hungry or just eating because it tastes so good? Eat slowly. It takes 20 minutes for the brain and stomach to coordinate the signal that you're full. By eating slowly, you're more likely to feel the full response before you've overeaten. Remind yourself that half the fun of eating a festive holiday meal is the leftovers. Eat half of what you want at dinner, then, eat the other half the next day.

Starvation Before an Important Meal May Backfire: Some people decide to starve themselves in preparation for a big meal or party. If you arrive starving, it will be just that much harder to keep yourself from eating everything in sight. Why sign-up for disappointment and self-judgment? If you eat some protein at breakfast and then a light lunch before the event, you will be much less likely to overindulge.

The Glass is Half-Full: It's important to note that being healthy during the holiday season doesn't mean deprivation. Think of it as moderation and balance. If you do overindulge, be gentle with yourself and plan lighter meals for the next few days. Fresh veggie juices, broths and steamed veggies are great choices.

Whether you are celebrating at home, with friends or at a fancy cocktail hour, remember to focus on the people with you and the conversation flowing around you. Enjoy socializing with people you haven't seen all year. Take a moment to be thankful and appreciative of the abundance in your life. All these things "feed" us and when we are nourished this way, food and drink fade in importance, rather than being in the spotlight. When we are successful at putting our attention on the good things in life, the law of attraction draws even more to us. That's the best gift of all!

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