



Happy, Healthy Holiday Eating

The holiday season is a time of celebration and abundance. However, the holidays also teem with tasty temptations and can present challenges if you are trying to maintain healthy habits.

Here are some practical ideas for enjoying your favorite holiday foods without packing on the pounds, from Jennie McCary, MS, RD, LD, the wellness coordinator for Albuquerque public schools and chair of the Action for Healthy Kids project team in New Mexico.

Create and Stick to a Plan

To help maintain healthy habits, identify potential problem areas and anticipate situations that may present challenges, advises Kate Geagan, MS, RD, president of IT Nutrition, a nutrition consulting company in Park City, Utah. Allow yourself some slack and don't aim for perfection. "Choose to focus on two areas at most," recommends Geagan, "such as [sticking to] a firm workout schedule [and] avoiding the cheese tray if that is a weakness." By recognizing and anticipating your primary weaknesses, you are more likely to stick with a plan, she says.

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Maintain a Regular Schedule

While the holidays can be hectic, it is important to eat at normal mealtimes. Don't try to "make up" for bad eating by skipping at breakfast or lunch, notes Geagan. "This sets [you] up for poor energy, hunger and bad food choices at the next party." Once again, it helps to have a plan to maintain your resolve. For example, if you are going to an evening festivity, eat a balanced, lighter lunch, such as a mixed green salad with grilled chicken and chopped apples. It is also helpful to try to eat a high-fiber snack, like a handful of colorful veggies, midafternoon to avoid going to the party starving.

Practice Mindfulness

Before you heap any party food onto your plate, scan the offerings on the table. Consciously take one "virtual" trip through the buffet to see what is being served. This will help you make better choices. And savor both the food you eat *and* the conversations you have with other guests; eating more slowly will help you be more aware of when you are satisfied and feeling full. Another strategy is to create a physical buffer zone that is a safe distance from the buffet, says Victoria Shanta Retelny, RD, LD, owner of LivingWell Communications in Chicago. This prevents you from being within arm's distance of those tempting dishes and discourages mindless munching. ■



when you're hosting a gathering

How can you offer your guests festive fare and healthy foods at a holiday dinner or party?

First, look for ways to reduce *overall* calories. The quickest and easiest way to do this is to limit the number of high-fat offerings, says Kyle Shadix, MS, RD, professional chef and food service instructor at Columbia University/Teachers College in New York City. "Some recipes just *need* butter, but you can cut the amount the recipe calls for," he confides. You can also reduce the amount of sugar called for in most holiday recipes.

Another strategy for health-conscious hosts is to buy or prepare portion-controlled treats. "Offering individual desserts and appetizers makes it easy to have just a taste, not half the cake," says Victoria Shanta Retelny, RD, LD, owner of LivingWell Communications in Chicago.

While every host wants to have enough food for all the guests, don't go overboard with your menu offerings. "I encourage clients not to cook too much food, and only to use fresh ingredients," notes Shadix. Faced with mounds of extra food, guests may feel inclined to eat more, and if they don't, you will be stuck with all those leftovers!

In addition to cooking less food, it's a good idea to place higher-calorie items in smaller serving dishes, according to Ruth Baldwin, MA, RD, owner of RB Consulting LLC in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "It encourages people to serve themselves less," she says.