

# 10 Eating Tips for a Healthy Holiday Season

*Food is an important part of many holidays, celebrations, family and cultural traditions. In fact, special occasions often center around food. As a result, many people gain a little (or a lot) of weight between Thanksgiving and the New Year.*



*What's to blame? Perhaps it's all the delicious treats available during the holiday season or the pressure from family, friends, and co-workers to overeat. Maybe it's increased emotional eating (whether it be from holiday stress or holiday joy) or more laxity with eating and physical activity regimens in anticipation of the strict "new diet and exercise plan" you're going to start January 1<sup>st</sup>.*

*Regardless of the reasons, it is not necessary to avoid holiday festivities in an attempt to maintain your weight. Consider these 10 tips for maintaining a healthy, balanced lifestyle*

*while fully enjoying the holiday season!*

**1. Focus on weight maintenance vs. weight loss during the holidays.** If you are currently overweight and want to lose weight, this may not be the time to do it. Maintenance of your present weight is a good goal during the holiday season. Don't set yourself up for failure by making unrealistic goals for yourself.

**2. Plan on NOT dieting after the New Year.** Anticipation of food restriction sets you up for binge-type eating over the holidays ("after all, if I'm never going let myself eat this again after Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, I might as well eat as much as possible now!") Besides, restrictive diets don't work in the long run. They increase your loss of lean body mass vs. fat, slow down your metabolism, increase anxiety, depression, food preoccupation, and binge eating, and make weight re-gain more likely. Dieting is clearly not the answer for your New Year's resolution; positive, and long-term LIFESTYLE CHANGES are!

**3. Be physically active in some way most days of the week.** Often, our busy holiday schedules (or lack of structured schedules) take us off our exercise routines. Physical activity, especially aerobic activities (like brisk walking, jogging, bicycling, roller blading, and swimming) can help relieve stress, regulate appetite, and burn up extra calories from holiday eating.

**4. Don't skip meals.** It is not a good idea to arrive at a party famished. Not only are you more likely to overeat, but you are also less likely to limit the higher fat and higher calorie foods available. Don't skip meals in anticipation of "saving room for the next meal". You could also have a healthy snack before you go to take the edge off, such as a piece of fruit, a small carton of light yogurt, or string cheese.

**5. Make a plan.** If you are concerned about overeating, think about which foods are really special to you (those you really want to eat) vs. those that you could probably do without. Contemplate your personal triggers to overeat and how can you minimize them. Once you've thought about all of these things, make a plan of action. It's much easier to deal with a difficult social eating situation if you've already planned for it.

**6. Take steps to minimize recreational eating.** While some foods are more calorie-dense than others, no food will make you gain weight unless you eat too much of it. At parties and holiday dinners, we tend to eat (or keep eating) beyond our body's physical hunger simply because food is there and eating is a "social thing." To avoid recreational eating, consciously make one plate of the foods you really want. Eat it slowly--enjoying and savoring every tasty bite. Then, when you're done, pop a mint or stick of gum in your mouth, get a tall glass of water and sip on it throughout the night, or position yourself away from the buffet table or food trays to keep yourself from overeating.



**7. Reduce the fat in holiday recipes.** There are plenty of low fat and low calorie substitutes that are amazingly tasty. Try using applesauce in place of oil in your favorite holiday breads; use egg substitutes in place of whole eggs; try plain nonfat yogurt in place of sour cream. Magazines are full of reduced calorie and reduced fat holiday recipes. Give them a try, and share your cooking creations with friends and family.

**8. Choose your beverages wisely.** Alcohol is high in calories. Liquors, sweet wines and sweet mixed drinks contain 150-450 calories per glass. By contrast, water and diet sodas are calorie-free. If you choose to drink alcohol, select light wines and beers, and use non-alcoholic mixers such as water and diet soda. Limit your intake to 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks per occasion. Also, be aware of the extra calories in soda, fruit punch, and egg nog.

**9. Enjoy good friends and family.** Although food can be a big part of the season, it doesn't have to be the focus. Holidays are a time to reunite with good friends and family, to share laughter and cheer, to celebrate and to give thanks. Focus more on these other holiday pleasures, in addition to the tastes of holiday foods. The important thing to remember is balance and moderation. It's OK to eat too much once in a while. Just relax, enjoy the holidays, and remember what the season is all about.



**10. Maintain perspective:** Overeating one day won't make or break your eating plan. And it certainly won't make you gain weight! It takes many days of overeating to gain weight. If you over-indulge at a holiday meal, put it behind you. Return to your usual eating plan the next day without guilt or despair.

# Happy Holidays!

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