

Yes, the holidays are upon us. From office parties to family celebrations, the holidays are times of sharing food and entertaining, however combine the festivities with hectic shopping, a chaotic social calendar, year's-end work deadlines and the "no time to work out" syndrome, you've got a recipe for holiday weight gain. By eating just 200 extra calories a day — a piece of pecan pie and a tumbler of eggnog here, a couple latkes and some butter cookies there — you could pack on two to three pounds over this five to six-week period. That doesn't sound like much, except few people shed that extra weight in the New Year. You don't need to deprive yourself, eat only boring foods, or take your treats with a side order of guilt. Instead, by practicing a bit of defensive eating and cooking, you can come through the holidays without making "go on a diet" one of your New Year's resolutions.

Be realistic. As we all know, excess pounds don't disappear along with the decorations. Instead of trying to lose weight during the holidays, set a goal of weight maintenance. You can then focus on shedding pounds once the hustle and bustle ends, and if you've maintained, you won't have extra weight to lose in January. It may seem like a contradiction to be able to enjoy the holidays and maintain your weight, but it's not.

Stay in the zone and make fitness a priority. I like to remind people that food is only one part of the equation when it comes to maintaining a healthy weight. Exercise is important. Don't let your workouts go by the wayside. If anything, you should be trying to work out more than before to curb weight gain and extra eating. Just remember this: Burn it (exercise) to earn it (extra holiday calories). Schedule your workout like an appointment. You wouldn't miss work, a doctor's appointment or an important meeting to bake cookies or do some holiday shopping, would you? Add your workouts to your calendar so that other obligations don't get in the way of your gym time. Tell your friends that you'd love to attend the holiday get together, but you won't arrive until after zumba class lets out. Put on your dancing (or walking) shoes. Dancing is a great way to work off some holiday calories. If you are at a family gathering, suggest a walk before the feast or even between dinner and dessert. If you're at the mall doing your holiday shopping, take a few

laps around the building before you start looking for gifts. Get creative with your time.

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Be proactive. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays. Take a breather and make some time for yourself. Treat yourself to a stress-relieving gift this year. While you're out shopping for family, friends, and loved ones find time for yourself, a half hour massage, a trip to the movies, or even just a long hot bath before bed. Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to and be open to creating new ones.

Before heading through the buffet line circle around the food table so you can focus on the healthy foods you want to eat and avoid added temptation. Don't stand around the horderve table all evening when you are at a party – mingle. Focus your energy on making conversation with others instead of focusing on food. After all, conversation is calorie-free. If you are hosting, use that to your advantage, it puts you in control of what will be served. Choose lower fat meats like turkey breast, lean ham and/or fish. Use a gravy separator to de-fat the gravy. Use 2 egg whites rather than a whole egg or opt for applesauce when baking. Use skim milk and low-fat cheeses and finally flavour with lots of herbs and spices.



Don't make mountains out of molehills. With office lunches and evening holiday celebrations it's easy to go over your calories one day and feel like a failure. Expect to overeat somewhat and cut back on eating the day before or after. Remember that it takes much more than one day of overeating to thwart your progress. Accept your slip-ups and move on.

No doubt there are numerous occasions to raise a glass with family and friends during the holidays. But, before you reach for the eggnog, remember that some mixed drinks can have as many calories as a decadent dessert. It's okay to indulge in some holiday spirits just remember to pace yourself, drink water or seltzer between drinks and consume mixed drinks with club soda when possible.

Finally, don't beat yourself up about indulging in your favorite goodies. Enjoying and treating yourself is part of what the holidays are all about. Tomorrow is another day — and another chance to focus on healthy behaviors. Enjoy this time of year! You may be so busy buying presents, entertaining guests, decorating the home and going out to celebrate that you forget to take the time to just relax. Enjoy good food (in moderation) and quality time with family and friends.

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

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