

Secrets to Healthy Holiday Eating

With the winter holiday season comes the challenge of avoiding that annoying holiday weight gain. However, with a bit of advance planning you can maintain your weight and still have a good time. Try these tips to help you have a happy and healthy holiday season.

Plan Ahead

When you look at your week consider the social activities at work and at home that are likely to occur. Then plan ahead. For example, if you know you are going to a party at someone's home on Friday night, having a large lunch at the country buffet restaurant that day probably isn't the best idea. Don't skip meals – that will just make you more likely to binge on high calorie party foods. Instead, plan healthy, low calorie meals around the "party" meals.

Don't Diet

While it tends to be true all year long that diets don't work, it is especially true during the holidays. With all the temptations at parties and at work, trying to stick to a diet – especially one that limits certain foods or food groups - can be a recipe for binge eating. Instead, exercise portion control. Allow yourself small portions of a variety of foods. Put larger portions of raw veggies, steamed shrimp and lean meats on your plate, and a much smaller portion of that chocolate cheesecake that's calling your name.

Don't Arrive Hungry

If you show up at an event hungry and thirsty, you will overindulge in pretty much everything. Have a small healthy snack an hour or so before the party. Something like low-fat string cheese and a couple of crackers, or peanut butter on a rice cake, and lots of water will help you keep your willpower up.

Eat Slowly and Drink Water

Two of the major reasons for overeating are being thirsty and not paying attention when your body says it's full. Many times when we have cravings for food, we're really dehydrated and need water. Drinking plenty of water throughout the day can keep this under control, and it's something your body needs year 'round. Drinking flavored seltzer water or putting lemon or lime slices in your water make it tastier.

Fiber is Your Friend

High fiber foods are not only healthy, but they fill you up and make you less likely to overindulge on less healthy foods. Salad is a great way to start a meal (opt for low-fat dressing), baked sweet potatoes (skip the butter), raw veggies, and fruits like apples, blueberries and bananas are all high fiber foods that taste great.

Be Aware of Healthy Fast Food Choices

You're at the mall trying to finish your shopping and you're starving. Just looking at the food court can be enough to make you gain weight (especially if you're near a bakery)! Don't despair – there are healthy, low-fat choices even in the food court.

Subway has some great sandwich and salad choices with less than 5 grams of fat. Choose a sandwich with spicy mustard instead of mayonnaise or oil and skip the cheese to keep the fat grams and calories in the healthy range.

Taco Bell also has some good choices. Their grilled chicken soft taco has 190 calories and only 6 grams of fat. Their pintos & cheese has 180 calories and 7 grams of fat – and about half the fiber you'll need for the entire day.

Even McDonalds has some healthy choices, including their hamburger with 280 calories and 10 grams of fat, the Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad with fat-free herb vinaigrette at 245 calories and 7 grams of fat.

Exercise, Exercise, Exercise

Take advantage of the many errands associated with the season to walk as much as you can. If there is dancing at a party – dance! Schedule time to exercise and take care of yourself on your calendar just as you would schedule a meeting. When you are doing good things for your body, you will find that you feel more like eating healthy foods versus junk.