

Conquer the “Pound-Packing” Holidays: You Can Avoid the Inevitable

Having enjoyed a career as a nutritionist for over 30 years, it’s no huge surprise when clients disappear between Thanksgiving and New Year’s. Then magically, January 2nd rolls around and the phones don’t stop; everyone’s ready to get back on track and start eating healthfully again. Somewhere in our brains, a huge “eating permission slip” conveniently blocks out the fact that the average American gains between 7 – 10 pounds during these festivities.

Unfortunately, much of this weight stays on despite New Year’s resolutions to finally lose weight, eat healthfully, and exercise. On the rare occasion, a client will seek out my advice before this seemingly uncontrollable, over-indulging onslaught begins. Listed below are my tried and true tips for maintaining or at the very least, minimizing weight gain during the holidays. Additionally, let’s not forget maintaining your health! Poor eating, lack of exercise, lack of sleep, and too much alcohol lowers your resistance - making you much more susceptible to illness. Remember the mantra “moderation, moderation, moderation” and you can still enjoy all your favorites.

1. OF MOST IMPORTANCE IS YOUR MIND:. Make a mental & verbal contract with yourself prior to each holiday dinner or party. Say it out loud, write it down, post it on the fridge, tell a friend, or any other method that keeps you true to your personal promise. For example, “Thanksgiving is tomorrow. I will allow myself small tastings of my favorites but I will not overindulge just because it’s expected or acceptable. I will focus on friends and family in lieu of food. I know that my mind is exceptionally strong and that I can be stick to my commitment.
2. EAT NORMALLY ON THE DAY OF THE PARTY. Meal skipping is a guaranteed set-up for tremendous hunger coupled with lack of control. Eating lightly on the day of your party is fine – just don’t let yourself get too hungry. For example, if you know you’re going to eat mashed potatoes, stuffing, or dessert, feel free to skip most of your bread/starch servings that day. But do eat protein, vegetables, and fruit. Drinking water or eating a small meal before the party is also a great trick for preventing excessive eating.
3. IF YOU FEEL COMPELLED TO HAVE APPETIZERS, go for the fruit, vegetables (sans the high fat dip) and harder cheeses (sans the crackers).. These low- fat choices won’t destroy your predetermined eating strategy. They will actually nourish you and lessen your food cravings at the main meal and dessert.
4. REMEMBER THAT ALCOHOL INCREASES APPETITE AND DECREASES SELF-CONTROL; a perfect recipe for out-of-control overindulgence. Besides which, alcohol is nothing but “empty calories” providing zero nourishment. Once again, it is important to pre-set in your mind how many alcoholic beverages you will have at the party and to stick to it. Water or mineral water with a splash of lemon are great alternatives or in-betweeners. Another option is a wine spritzer: 2oz of white wine plus 2oz of mineral water – half the calories, half the alcohol and a great way to stretch out your evening’s allotment.
5. MAINTAIN AS MUCH CONSISTENCY IN YOUR WORKOUT PROGRAM AS POSSIBLE. By doing so, you may not lose weight during the holidays, but it may be the key to keep from gaining it. Even if you have to drop one or two of your weekly workouts, don’t get discouraged and blow off your entire exercise program until after the holidays. That’s surely a recipe for weight gain and poor health.
6. IMMEDIATELY RESUME YOUR HEALTHY EATING REGIME AFTER THE PARTY. Be careful to not continue the nibble theme. Shockingly, it takes only 3 days of bad habits to trigger long-term cravings – especially if you are only eating the culprits and not balancing your nourishment throughout the day.

In closing, enjoy your holidays and try not to over think it. Once you make the mental note, trust it and the rest will fall in place. Cheers and best of luck!

