



CONSUMED



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15 TIPS FOR HOLIDAY EATING WITHOUT WEIGHT GAIN

By Michelle May, M.D.

Do you anticipate the holidays but dread the "inevitable" holiday weight gain? Do your holiday events revolve around eating more than the meaning, people, presents, decorations, or travel?

Avoiding holiday weight gain and eating healthy during the holidays can be a real challenge unless you have a great strategy. These 15 holiday eating tips will help you avoid holiday weight gain and enjoy the season *more* while eating *less*.

1. It is easier to get distracted from signals of physical hunger and satiety at social gatherings, especially if food is the main event. Make an effort to pay close attention to your body's signals.
2. Be a food snob. Skip the store-bought goodies, the dried-out fudge and the so-so stuffing. If the food you select doesn't taste as good as you expected, stop eating it and choose something else. Think of how much less you'd eat if you only ate things that tasted fabulous!
3. Think of your appetite as an expense account. How much do you want to spend on appetizers or the entrée? Do you want to save some room for dessert? Go through this process mentally to avoid eating too much food and feeling uncomfortable for the rest of the evening.
4. Pace your eating prior to the event so you'll be hungry but not famished at mealtime. But please, ignore the old diet advice of "eat before you go to a party so you won't be tempted." That is absurd! You want to be hungry enough to enjoy your favorites.
5. Socialize away from the sight of the food. People who tend to overeat are "food suggestible" so just hanging around food causes them to eat more than they need.
6. Survey all of the food at a buffet before making your choices. Choose the foods that you really want most at that time and remind yourself that you can have the other foods at a later time.
7. If the food is so special, give it your full attention rather than eating on autopilot. Eat mindfully by reducing distractions and sitting down to eat - even if it's just a cookie. Appreciate the appearance and aroma of your food and savor one small bite at a time by putting your fork down. You'll eat less food but enjoy it more.
8. If the food doesn't taste as good as you expected, stop eating it and choose something else.
9. Since the duration of the meal tends to be extended at social events, you may need to have your plate taken away (or put your napkin on it) once you are satisfied to avoid nibbling unconsciously.
10. Be aware of the effects of alcohol on your food intake. And don't forget that many beverages contain calories too.
11. Be cautious of "obligatory eating" - avoid eating just because it is on the table, on your plate, because you paid for it, it's free, or because someone made it. Deal with Food Pushers with a polite but firm, "No thank you." If you're concerned about hurting their feelings, ask for the recipe or a small portion to take home with you for another meal.
12. It's common to have candy and snacks lying all over the place this time of year. Avoid indulging in food just because it's there. Grazing unconsciously leads to extra calories that you probably won't even remember enjoying.
13. Before having a cookie, a piece of fudge or other holiday treat that was laid in the break room, check your hunger level. If you're hungry and you choose a favorite food to satisfy you, remember to sit down and eat it mindfully - no guilt.
14. At restaurants, the portion sizes are usually huge - almost always "two for the price of one." Request appetizer portions, co-order and co-eat with your dining partner, or have the server package up your meal to go as soon as you feel satisfied. Remember, "super-size" is no bargain if you didn't need that much food in the first place!
15. Look for opportunities for physical activity - take a walk after dinner to enjoy the lights, take a few laps around the mall before it opens to do some window shopping or take guests to local attractions.

Most importantly, delight all of your senses. Enjoy the company, the atmosphere, the entertainment, and the traditions as much, if not more, than the food.

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