

# Healthy Holiday Eating

Food is everywhere during the holiday season, making it tough to stick to your healthy eating and exercise habits. With a little attention, however, you can make it through the holidays without losing track of your healthy lifestyle.

**Q: Is it true that the average person gains 5 pounds between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day?**

**A:** People often do gain weight during the holidays. One 2000 study of 195 adults showed an average holiday weight gain of between three quarters and one pound. However, 14% of those studied gained five pounds or more. In this study those who were overweight or obese gained more holiday pounds than those who were normal weight.

**Q: I have been losing weight successfully for 6 months. I'm dreading the holiday season because I know I'll gain weight. What can I do to prevent it?**

**A:** The best advice is to change your mindset. Rather than focus on continuing to lose weight during this 6-week period, focus instead on not gaining weight. Consider yourself successful if you continue to exercise regularly and don't gain any weight. Remember-the holiday season should be enjoyable, and fine food is one of the pleasures of the season. Instead of depriving yourself, allow yourself to splurge on those foods that make your holiday season meaningful. Enjoy your favorites in small amounts, and try to cut back in other ways. And make an effort to keep your exercise schedule on track.



**Q: I'll be traveling during the holidays and can't get to my gym. What can I do to stay active?**

**A:** Of course continuing regular exercise during the hectic and sometimes stressful holiday season can help you maintain your weight and your sanity. If you are a true "gym rat", most gyms will allow you to pay per visit as a guest, although sometimes at a hefty fee! Walking, running, or stair-climbing are easy when you are traveling-you can do these activities almost anywhere. For resistance training, check your sporting goods or on-line stores for rubber resistance bands. They slip easily into a travel bag, are lightweight, and can be used to strengthen and tone almost any body part.

**Q: I always overeat at holiday functions. Can you give me some tips to help keep me on track?**

**A:** There are many ways to keep your calorie intake under control during the festivities. Try these tips and see which ones work for you:

- Survey the entire table before you take any food. Decide what foods are worth eating and what can be ignored, and then stick to that decision. Why waste calories on foods that don't bring you pleasure?
- Eat a snack before you leave home. If you arrive at a party starving, you'll be more likely to overindulge.
- Eat your calories instead of drinking them. Stick to lower calorie or calorie-free drinks (diet sodas, water, light beer, or wine spritzer) instead of punches, eggnogs, and mixed drinks that can have up to 500 calories per cup.
- Sip a large glass of water between every alcoholic drink or non-alcoholic punch or eggnog. This will help keep you hydrated and you'll drink fewer calories by the end of the night.

- When you are the host or hostess, include nutritious and lower-calorie foods like fruits, vegetables, and lean meats on the menu. When you are a guest, bring along a lower-calorie dish to share.
- Try not to hang out near the food. Find a comfortable spot across the room and focus on people instead of eating.
- Watch your portion sizes. Don't cover your plate completely with food. In most cases, especially when it comes to holiday sweets and alcoholic beverages, less is better.
- Drop out of the "clean plate club". Leave a few bites behind every time you eat, especially if you are eating something you don't really care for.
- Enjoy your favorite holiday treats but take a small portion, eat slowly, and savor the taste and texture of the wonderful foods of the season.

**Visit these websites for free reduced-calorie and reduced-fat recipes:**

[www.foodfit.com](http://www.foodfit.com)

[www.deliciousdecisions.org](http://www.deliciousdecisions.org)

[www.allrecipes.com](http://www.allrecipes.com)

**References:**

Roberts SB, Mayer J. Holiday Weight Gain: Fact or Fiction? *Nutr Rev* 58(12):378-9, 2000.

