

Healthy Eating for Happy Holidays

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The average American will consume about 4,500 calories on Thanksgiving Day when taking into consideration pre-meal snacking, the actual dinner, dessert, then evening leftovers. That is enough to gain a pound or two, which can be remedied, but how many more days will there be like this?

Actually, there is the potential for quite a few as the holidays approach. Though COVID-19 is changing the way we celebrate, there will still be food on pre-holiday occasions, then there is Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Christmas week, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. In addition to extra meals and calories is the reality that activity levels generally taper off during the holidays. The combination of overeating and not much exercise has the potential to provide weight gain that is often not lost, and year after year, a few more pounds can add to the tally.

With planning and discipline, it is possible to get through the holidays without gaining weight and being mad at yourself in January. Consider these tips for healthy holiday eating.

1. Eat what you love and leave what you like. You don't have to eat everything that is put in front of you. Make careful choices and stick with the foods you enjoy most. Don't select foods that aren't your favorite just because they are there.
2. Follow the three-bite rule. People seem to most enjoy the first and last bites of what they eat, so put a bite in between and call it good.
3. Focus your attention on enjoying those you are with, not the food.
4. Fill your plate with 80 percent healthy foods, and save the other 20 percent for dessert or treats.

5. Skip the punch and eat the cake. You'll likely enjoy eating your calories more than drinking them.
6. Don't save up for later. It doesn't make sense to starve all day because you have a gathering that night. You will likely end up consuming more because you are hungry. Eat light, but don't skip meals.
7. Pack snacks. Keep healthy snack choices available in your purse, bag or car when you're on the run so you don't overeat at mealtimes.
8. Don't skimp on sleep. Being tired and cranky won't be good for anyone during the holidays.
9. Drink water. Staying hydrated during the hustle and bustle will help you feel your best and will also help you not feel so hungry when you get to the table. Drink water with your meals rather than soda.
10. Make small daily changes. Use whole wheat bread instead of white. Eat vegetables every day with dinner. Make sure your dessert includes a fruit. Use herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor your meals. Eat a green salad every day.
11. Serve meals on a smaller plate to help you practice portion control.
12. Pack lunch each day instead of eating out.
13. Walk or do some form of exercise for at least 30 minutes a day.

Pick one of the tips above and do it each day until it becomes a habit. Then move on to another one. Over time, the simple choice to do one healthy thing will have helped you create a healthy lifestyle. The joy you will feel from accomplishing a goal will be the gift that keeps on giving.

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