

MANAGING YOUR HOLIDAY CALORIES

BY BARBI WALKER

The holidays are here, and so are the homemade cookies, pies, candies and big meals that come with it! Delicious, right? However, with so many tasty temptations at every turn, managing your calories during the holiday season is as important as it is challenging.

So how do you control your calories? Most importantly, start with a plan, and consciously consider what you are going to eat during the festivities—but there are other methods to the madness.

DITCH THE “ALL OR NOTHING” MENTALITY

Although the average weight gain during the holidays is about 1 to 2 pounds, according to the American Dietetic Association (ADA), the fact that the weight stays on and accumulates each year is what is problematic. It takes only 250 extra calories a day to add up to a half pound weight gain by the end of the week. This holiday, instead of thinking about losing the weight after the holidays, think about maintaining your current weight.

The “all or nothing” mentality (thinking you can eat it all now and worry about it later), is a recipe for disaster. This way of thinking is the first place people often go wrong during the holidays, says Michele Dudash, a registered dietitian and health columnist for The Arizona Republic, a chef and the president of the Arizona Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

“The holidays are not the time to get into the mindset of saving up your calories for the big night or big meal by skipping your regular meals,” says Dudash.

Stick to your regularly scheduled meals and include plenty of lean protein and whole grains, especially at breakfast, Dudash says. Eating fresh veggies at lunch and for non-holiday meals is another way to keep your calories down and your hunger at bay, she adds.

No one wants to feel deprived, especially during the holidays, so pick your favorites. Think about the foods that you absolutely love during the holidays and eat a small amount of these. “Food is to be enjoyed,” says Dudash. “Don’t be afraid of certain foods. The more plant-based foods you have in your daily diet, the less you will eat of the ‘bad’ foods.”

PLAY MIND GAMES

It’s sometimes hard to resist all the delicious temptations around, but by using some simple mind tricks it might keep extra holiday pounds off.

- **START WITH SMALL PLATES** Experts agree that using small plates is the best defense against taking too much food. Also, give yourself a few minutes for your brain to catch up before you go back for seconds, adds Dudash.
- **EAT BEFORE YOU GO** If you are going to a party, plan ahead and eat something high in fiber just before you go. Eating low-calorie vegetables, a small salad, or an apple right before a party helps



you feel fuller, which means you will probably eat less once you get there.

- **BRING A HEALTHY DISH** One sure way to have something healthy and delicious at the party is to make it yourself—bring something to share in a pretty serving dish for the host or hostess to keep as a gift, says Beth Aldrich, a healthy lifestyle and nutrition expert and author of *Real Moms Love to Eat*.

For a healthier holiday, Dudash advises, “Pick a few of your ‘cannot miss’ holiday favorites and mix in a couple of new, modern lighter recipes.” Her new book “Clean Eating for Busy Families” includes a chopped salad that was the hit of her Christmas dinner last year and is now one of her new holiday favorites.

HIDE YOUR WEAKNESS

Your favorite “guilty pleasure” might be a frequent temptation for you over the holidays, showing up at work, in the store, and even at home—but it’s best to keep those irresistible goodies out of sight whenever possible. Moving alluring foods to a lesser used location reduces the possibility of nibbling on them throughout the day.

If your office has tempting goodies, make a deal with your co-workers to keep these holiday treats to one area, not all over the office. On your end, keep healthy snacks like nuts, fresh fruit and veggies at your desk to avoid overindulging on holiday treats.

BE FESTIVE BUT IMBIBE IN MODERATION

The holidays are meant to share good times with friends and family, and cocktails are often part of the holiday celebration—but those liquid calories can add up quickly. “Cocktails will be flowing, so make sure to watch out for the sugary ones,” says Dudash. Choosing lighter drinks like wine or light beer saves on calories, and alternating water between drinks is also helpful.

BE SOCIAL—TALK MORE, EAT LESS

The holidays are a time to be more social, and a time to enjoy the company of family and friends, some of whom you rarely get a chance to see. The more you talk, the less you will eat, so take time to enjoy the people around you, focus on the conversation and talk away from the buffet table.

“Focus on what you can have, not on what you can’t have,” says Dudash.

Food will always be part of the holidays, but with a little discipline, you won’t have to make losing weight one of your new resolutions, and you can enjoy the holiday sweet treats and temptations with ease. ■

Barbi Walker is a freelance writer and an award-winning journalist. Barbi lives in Phoenix with her husband and young son.