

healthy dining * Nancy Adler

Maintain

YOU CAN HAVE THAT COOKIE, BUT EAT SLOWLY AND EAT SMALLER PORTIONS

Over the holidays, you will enjoy favorite holiday dishes, wonderful family traditions, and extra holiday social gatherings. In the midst of holiday fun and preparations, try to remember to eat and sleep well. Being well nourished and rested will allow you to enjoy all the holiday festivities. There are no good and bad foods, only good and bad eating habits. A balanced diet that provides a steady stream of energy, repairs and restores the body, and helps manage stress and prevents mood swings. What matters most is the types of foods that we eat during the holidays. We should choose fewer foods that consist of sugars and high in fats while selecting more fruits and vegetables, which are packed with important vitamins and minerals. Excess weight gain during the holidays often comes from eating too many high fat or sugary holiday foods.

I encourage my clients during this challenging time of the year, to set limits ahead. It's okay to have a cookie but make a plan ahead of time. The problem doesn't come from one cookie if planned. The problem arises from that impulsive behavior when we grab the sweets without any thought. They are there in front of us so we grab. Then before we know it we are back in that addicting sugar traps that we have worked so hard to get out of. Keep a food journal. Be accountable. Make your plan to enjoy a homemade holiday cookie as long as its planned and not too often.

Take control. Before a holiday event, eat a light snack or even a protein bar. Cottage cheese is high in protein and will help you to eat less later. Fasting ahead oftime or saving up will only cause you to eat more later on and later at night.

Exercise, even if it's less than usual. Just taking a walk can do a lot for your mental and physical health.

Place a priority on sleep. Everything is more manageable when you are well-rested. Adults require seven to nine hours of sleep per night to function optimally during the day. Plan for winding down time of at least 30 minutes before you go to bed. You'll fall asleep sooner and sleep more soundly.

Though the holidays are time for traditions, don't try to do it all. Simplifying your holiday will reduce your stress. Rely on family to help with preparations.

Remember, too much sugar will rob you of energy rather than give you more.

Be realistic about your health goals during the holidays.

Accept weight maintenance vs. weight loss.

If you are hosting a holiday event, do your guests a favor by including non-alcoholic beverages and healthier items such as vegetables, salad and fruit on the menu. Use low-calorie dressings. Putting these items out before the sweets, meats and souffles will give everyone a better chance of not over doing it.

Look for healthy substitutes for ingredients when you whip up your favorite holiday fare. You may be able to use low fat or skim milk products instead of whole milk products in some dishes. In some baked foods, you can swap applesauce for oil. Switching ingredients can create tasty results without the high calories that often come with rich foods.

Wash it down. What you drink during the holidays can add calories. Look at all of your options. Alcoholic beverages and many fruit punches can be long on calories but short on nutrition. Instead look for ciders, clear diet sodas, and even flavored waters.

Play it Smart. Here are a few tips for healthy holiday eating:

- Eat smaller portions of food. This is especially important at a buffet, where you may not want to try everything. Choose the items you want to try the most in small portions.
- Eat slowly. Many times, people eat so fast that their stomachs don't have enough time to register that they are full. Savor each bite and enjoy the taste of the food; chances are you will eat less.
- Offer to bring a low-calorie dish to the party. Your host will appreciate it and this is at least one healthy item that will be on hand.
- Don't park yourself near the buffet at the holiday party. Mingle! You're more likely to eat more standing near the food than if you're across the room.
- Be realistic. Don't try to diet during the holidays. Just aim to maintaining your present weight.

Food and holidays go hand and hand. So join in and help yourself to a few tasty treats, keeping you good lifestyle habits that you have lived by all yearlong. If you've been exercising keep it up all through the holiday season. With a dash of discipline and proper planning, you'll have a great recipe for holiday fun without the regret that many of us feel the next time we step on the scale.