

Go ahead, have pie (or gravy) during holidays, expert says

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A Purdue University expert says people who try to deprive themselves of their favorite foods during the holiday season to avoid weight gain are setting themselves up for failure.

"Deprivation doesn't work," says Laura Palmer, a Cooperative Extension Service specialist in foods and nutrition and a registered dietitian.

"Usually, people will cave in later and end up overeating."

A better bet, she says, is looking over all the offered foods and considering which ones you really love.

"Don't just try a little of everything to be polite," Palmer says. "Make one plate of the foods you really want. Eat it slowly and enjoy every bite."

Eating slowly can be a key to success in keeping pounds at bay, she says, since it takes approximately 20 minutes for your brain to get the message from your stomach that it's full.

"When people eat fast, they don't realize when they are full, and many extra calories are consumed."

Palmer offers the following suggestions to survive family feasts and holiday parties without weight gain:

- * Plan to eat something light before going to parties. Arriving at a party

hungry makes you more likely to overeat.

- * Be conscious of beverages. Alcohol can contain as many as 450 calories per glass. Use low-calorie mixers, such as water or diet soda, and limit alcohol to one or two drinks. Drink small amounts of other high-calorie beverages like punch and eggnog.

- * Don't eat just to be social. Stand away from the food table to help avoid grazing. After eating, chew gum or sip water for the remainder of the evening.

- * Strive to be physically active every day. Despite busy schedules, physical activity is still important during the holidays.

"Physical activity can help relieve stress, regulate appetite and burn off extra calories," Palmer says. "It's the perfect antidote for all that comes with the holidays, from extra mashed potatoes to disagreements with family."

- * Focus on friends and family instead of food. Holidays are a time to reunite and share good times.

"Food doesn't have to be the focus of the holidays," Palmer says. "Try to relax and remember what the seasons are all about."

Source: Purdue University

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