

Maintain, don't gain during the holidays

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For many people, the holiday season brings shopping and parties with plenty of delicious food. How do you maintain good eating habits and avoid weight gain when there are so many temptations that can doom even the most disciplined eaters?

"By watching portion sizes and getting some exercise, you can enjoy favorite holiday foods while maintaining a healthy weight," said Mandel Smith, a nutrition educator with Penn State Cooperative Extension in Montgomery County. "When you celebrate the holiday season with friends and family, remember to focus on the fellowship and time together, not on the food."

Smith offered these tips to help you control calorie intake at holiday parties and buffets:

- Balance party food and meals with other meals. Eat smaller meals with fewer calories during the day so you can enjoy the party without going over your calorie needs for the day. "Include low-fat protein, fruits, vegetables and whole grains," Smith said. "The fiber in these foods will keep your stomach feeling full."
- Don't go to a party hungry. Eat a healthy snack before you leave for a party. If you go to a party hungry, you are more likely to overeat.
- Socialize away from the food table. This will reduce the temptation to overeat and allow you to focus on the great conversations you are having with your friends, family and coworkers.

-- Resist dessert. At dinner parties, skip dessert or choose fresh fruit if it is available. If you are served a dessert, eat half.

-- Remember, smaller is better. "When the food at a party is being served buffet-style, make one trip through the buffet line and take only small amounts of the foods that you really like," Smith recommended. "If possible, use a salad plate so that your plate looks full."

-- Listen to your stomach. Stop eating when you are no longer hungry. Eating until you are full (or stuffed) usually results in consuming more calories than you need.

Shopping also is a big part of the holidays for many people, which often means spending more time at the mall or department store. Smith suggested a few ways to help avoid extra calories while shopping:

-- Eat before going to the mall. Shopping on an empty stomach may cause you to overeat at mealtimes.

-- Share meals with a friend. Split meals and treats from the mall with a shopping buddy.

-- Take a snack with you to the mall. "Fresh fruit such as apples, bananas, small boxes of raisins or small bags of pretzels are handy snacks that transport well in a handbag or backpack," Smith advised. "These snacks are healthier than the butter pretzels and cookies often found throughout the mall."

Source: Penn State

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