

Five easy ways to prevent overeating during the holiday family dinner

December 23 2015, by Peter Janiszewski, Ph.d.

Despite the unseasonably warm weather, it's that time of the year again. People are scouring the malls for those last minute presents, holiday music is everywhere, kids are writing letters to Santa, and those who drew the short straw (or are masochists) are preparing to host their families for a big Christmas dinner. I don't know what it is about large family gatherings, whether its Thanksgiving or Christmas, but overconsumption seems to be part of the tradition. If you are hosting your family dinner, there are a number of helpful tricks you can utilize to ensure your whole family is not in a food-induced coma by the end of the evening.

The following tips come courtesy of Dr. Brian Wansink who has done countless studies on how your immediate environment affects your [dietary patterns](#). In his most recent book, *Slim by Design*, he breaks down numerous easily-actionable changes you can make to your home, workplace, or when shopping at grocery stores or dining at restaurants. Unlike most non-fiction self-help books that tend to be heavy on the theory and light on the actionable advice, *Slim by Design* is packed full of useful tips on every page.

Without further ado, here's what you can do to save your guests from overindulging during the family dinner:

- Give your guests smaller plates. According to Dr. Wansink's research, we tend to eat more food when it is placed on a large plate versus a small plate.

- Use smaller serving bowls. When food is served in a 3-quart bowl vs a 2-quart bowl, people will dish out an extra 17% of food.
- Use small serving spoons. Using large serving spoons leads to 14% greater consumption of calories. People will likely fatigue from multiple spooning, or will be prompted by another diner for the spoon so they can also serve themselves.
- Serve the food from the stove rather than from the table. Rather than placing all the available food in bowls within arm's reach on the dining table, simply serve each plate with a bit of everything and leave the bowls of remaining food on a separate counter or back in the kitchen. According to research, people who served from the stove or counter ate 19% less [food](#) by comparison to those who ate family style from the dining table.
- Regardless of the colour of wine guests are drinking, serve the wine in the narrow white-wine glasses. Since we focus more on the height of liquid in a container rather than its width, we pour 12% less wine into a white wine glass. The same holds true for serving drinks of any sort (juice, pop, etc.).

Armed with these 5 simple tips, you would have done your [family](#) a great service in making the healthy choice (not overeating) the easy choice. The beauty of it all? No one is likely to notice any of these subtle changes. But, at the end of the evening, they may notice that they can get off the couch with greater ease than expected.

Happy Holidays!

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