

How to enjoy the flavors of the season without derailing health

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Staying healthy during the holidays doesn't mean you can't enjoy the

parties and celebrations. Indulging a little won't hurt—if you plan ahead for meals that are healthy, too.

The key is to be prepared for the three-month period that begins with Halloween treats and winds up with New Year's festivities.

"We go from work, to the parties after work, to home, from October to Jan. 1. It just doesn't stop. And that, for a lot of us, presents lots of roadblocks," said registered dietitian Annessa Chumbley.

To avoid the average holiday weight gain of up to 3 pounds, people need to be mindful of what they're consuming.

"I like to encourage people to stay true to their goals, but to also live in the moment," said Chumbley. "What we don't want to do is the destructive mindset of, 'It's the holidays, so I'm not going to abide by anything.'"

Thinking ahead can keep you out of a food fog later.

"Do a little bit of mental preparation," she said. "Know what flavors you like best, so that way you can enjoy the things that you want to enjoy in a small amount, then move on and not feel guilty."

For example, if you love pumpkin pie, there's nothing wrong with having a slice. But she cautions against eating it all season long. Instead, go for [healthier options](#) with the same pumpkin flavor like a pumpkin spice smoothie or homemade [pumpkin pie](#) granola. Or, spoon canned pumpkin into Greek yogurt with toasted pecans, she said.

To slim down other seasonal favorites, follow these tips:

- Like eggnog? Fill your glass mostly with low-fat or skim milk

and add a small amount of eggnog to get that noggy flavor but with fewer calories.

- If cocoa is your drink of choice, use low-fat or fat-free hot chocolate mixes with low-fat or nonfat milk or hot water.
- Halve your cocktails by having a glass of water or sparkling water between each [alcoholic drink](#). This will leave less time or room to overindulge.
- What part of the bird do you like best? If you reach for the lighter pieces of meat, they have fewer calories than the darker ones. And, taking off the skin reduces fat and calories.
- You can still complement your meal with some dressing. But, make sure to limit it to about 1/4 cup.
- Want your cake (or pie) and eat it too? Use the buddy system. Split your dessert with someone or try bite-sized or half portions.
- Compare the labels of your holiday ingredients. Choose items with lower sodium, saturated fat and added sugars. And use low-fat or nonfat milk instead of whole milk or heavy cream.
- Replace salt with herbs and spices. Replace butter with a healthier vegetable oil (Chumbley prefers avocado or algae oil) or substitute equal parts unsweetened applesauce when baking.
- Use half wheat and half white flour in your baking recipes to work in more healthy whole grains.

Also, don't forget to keep moving all season. Activity can help make up for eating more than usual.

But perhaps most important, Chumbley said, is to incorporate healthy habits year-round.

"The problem isn't Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Day," she said. "If we're getting Thanksgiving-full 365 days a year, that's what the issue is."

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