

Healthy eating over the holidays

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Between bountiful buffets and "food-pushing relatives," the winter holidays hold landmines for those trying to eat healthy.

The biggest challenge is thinking of the period between Thanksgiving and January as a holi-MONTH instead of a few, individual holi-DAYs.

"People don't want to miss out on opportunities to consume special foods they don't often get to eat other times of the year," said Kara Bowers, a dietitian at Penn State College of Medicine.

So when faced with a sweet-looking spread, instead of trying just a bit of the special foods, maybe they indulge more than they should and end up overeating.

Then a couple of days later, they do it again at another gathering. And another...

"The key is to make sure it is truly celebratory and occasional, not habitual," she said. "Enjoying [holiday](#) foods on their respective holidays is reasonable and important. But limit your consumption of holiday foods between the actual holidays."

Bowers offers the following tips for navigating the holiday eating scene:

Make a plan

"If you know it's going to be a carb-heavy event, choose a salad with a lean protein for lunch. Also, eating lightly on the day of a party will ensure you are actually hungry at the event."

Bring the healthy dish

When you offer to bring a fruit or vegetable dish, it ensures that a healthy option is available.

Survey the scene

"Give the food table a once-over before deciding what to eat. Then,

prioritize what you most want to try. Allow yourself to try small amounts first and go back if you want more of something in particular."

Choose carefully

"Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables." If you really want dessert, go ahead. But cut it in half and leave the other half for someone else who might want to sample without splurging.

Practice mindful eating

Take your time and savor every bite rather than scarfing things down. "Give your body what it wants—in appropriate portions. Take time to listen to what you are actually craving" and whether you are hungry or not.

"Don't let your plate go empty while your [taste buds](#) didn't even notice. Chew, taste and thoroughly enjoy every single bit."

Fend off food-pushers

If you know someone is going to insist you eat more, be sure to never completely clean your plate. An empty [plate](#) is a sign that you are ready and hungry for more. If the food-pusher insists, graciously thank them for the delicious [food](#) and change the subject.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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