

Helpful hints for holiday eating and drinking

Holiday parties and family gatherings can present a special challenge when it comes to eating and drinking. From seasonal food offerings to the temptation of adult beverages, maintaining a healthy diet during the holidays means more than just avoiding the dessert table. You don't have to sacrifice all of your favorites but going into the holidays with a plan can help you avoid overindulging.

Healthy eating

Whether you have dietary restrictions, have been trying to lose weight or simply want to maintain rather than gain over the holidays, below are tips to help you stay healthy AND still enjoy.

- **Eat a healthy snack before leaving home.** This will reduce the risk of snacking or overeating while out running errands or celebrating. You can even bring a snack with you to substitute for a side or dessert.
- **Go to parties with a plan.** Check out the food offerings first before deciding what and how much you eat. Select a variety of foods that include some "fun" and some healthy ones. Fill your plate with less than you plan on eating, and if you're still hungry you can return for seconds.
- **Bring a dish.** Contribute your favorite healthy dish to the holiday buffet.
- **Savor every bite.** Eating slowly reduces your chances of eating too much. Practice eating mindfully and recognizing the signs of fullness.
- **Focus on balance rather than restriction.** Trying to avoid all desserts or fast food and heavily restricting your calorie intake can backfire and lead you to eating more than you planned due to hunger. Focus on consuming a balanced diet that includes all the major food groups in moderation.
- **Fill up on fruits and vegetables.** Start with a heaping serving of fruits or vegetables that you can consume in higher quantities for less calories. The fiber and nutrients in these foods will help you feel full faster not to mention they provide a host of health benefits.
- **Have fun!** Stay engaged by focusing on the activities at hand instead of food. Converse with others rather than standing around the food table.

Alcohol advice

The festive atmosphere and even social nerves of gatherings can make holiday cocktails extra tempting. However, drinking may lower self-control, making you more likely to eat and consume beyond what you otherwise would.

- **Enjoy in moderation.** Limit yourself to one or two drinks. Choose those with a lower alcohol content and space out each one over the course of the event.
- **Choose healthier drink options.** With so many beverage options to choose from, you can find one that fits your dietary needs best. Look for low sugar or low-calorie options such as hard seltzers.
- **Set boundaries.** If you have a relative or a friend who is constantly refilling your wine glass, prepare for how you will handle the situation and set boundaries ahead of time.
- **Drink water.** Water is a healthy, no-calorie beverage (compared to 1 cup of eggnog that has 342 calories!). In between sips of whichever cocktail you choose, try drinking a glass of water.

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- **Know your relationship with alcohol.** Understanding the motivation behind your drinking can help you choose how much and when you indulge. For example, if you don't drink often during the rest of the year, you probably will have lower alcohol tolerance going into the holidays.
- **Go sober.** With lowered inhibitions, alcohol consumption can lead to risk-taking behaviors. Choosing to stay sober this holiday season can help you stay on track for your goals and enjoy the festivities safely.

Being a healthy host

If you're throwing the party, here are a few ways to host a healthier holiday event.

- **Offer a variety of low-fat, high-fiber foods.** There are lots of healthy options available. Consider offering fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, grilled or broiled lean meats, fish, turkey and chicken without the skin. Reduce the use of mayonnaise, oil and butter. Increase fiber with whole-grain breads, peas and beans.
- **Serve healthy alternatives to traditional holiday dishes.** Transform traditionally high-fat and high-calorie foods into healthier versions. You can use nonfat or 1% milk instead of whole milk or cream. Instead of frying, try baking or broiling foods whenever possible. Skip cream cheese and try low-fat cottage cheese or plain yogurt.
- **Provide a support system for your family members and friends.** If you know a friend or family member wants to focus on eating well this year, encourage them. For those with dietary restrictions such as choosing a plant-based diet, include options that fulfill their needs.
- **Control the risk of temptation.** As party host, you decide what items stay available for guests and for how long. If possible, remove food from public areas as soon as guests finish eating.

Remember that you're in charge of your dietary choices this holiday season, and that it's okay to set boundaries with what types of food and drink you consume and how often. But, don't forget to treat yourself once in a while and enjoy some of the delicious foods this time of year has to offer.

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