

Branch-Hillsdale- St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Ways to Have Your Cake and Eat it Too!

We all know how hard it is to resist your favorite holiday appetizers, entrees and/or desserts! Studies have shown that the average American gains 1-2 pounds during the holiday season, and those few pounds tend to stick around into the New Year! Year after year the pounds add up and can result in health problems associated with being overweight or obese. Having a plan in place will help you curve your cravings and keep the pounds from packing on during this food-filled season. Eating a healthy meal doesn't mean that you have to sacrifice on taste. Here are a few ways to stay healthy and fit while still enjoying your favorite holiday foods.

How can I avoid over eating when I am at a party? Eat at home before you leave for the party. This will fill you up with healthy foods so that you are not as tempted to snack on calorie filled appetizers all night long. You will also have more control over what you are eating because you will have prepared it yourself. When you are eating food prepared by a friend or family member, you might not know exactly how the food was prepared, or how many extra calories you are consuming.

What if I just can't resist? Remember, moderation is the key. If you just have to try each different kind of cheese on the appetizer tray and each cookie on the dessert platter, take only a few bites or take the smallest sliver of each kind of pie you want to taste. This way, you will get to try all of them but you won't be consuming as many calories. Don't forget to listen to your body! It will tell you when you are full and that you need to stop eating. Stand away from the food table and drink a tall glass of water or chew a piece of sugar free gum for the rest of the night. This will give you something to do and will lessen the temptation to graze on snacks and leftovers.

What about alcoholic beverages, should I or shouldn't I? Chose light wines over beer and mixed drinks. Alcohol is high in calories and will add up quickly. Eggnog, fruit punch, and soda are also calorie filled. Be sure to drink responsibly by limiting your number of drinks to 1 or 2 (and never drink and drive).

Are there any ways to cut back the fat in my meals? Yes! In your holiday breads you can try substituting applesauce in place of oil, use plain nonfat yogurt in place of sour cream and try using egg substitutes in place of whole eggs. Most recipes can be modified to increase health value without sacrificing taste. Here are some other ideas to enjoy the same foods you love, while helping to maintain your weight during the holiday season:

- Mash your potatoes with low-fat milk and skip the butter and salt.
- Take the skin off of your turkey breast or other white meat.
- Serve shrimp, fruits and vegetables as appetizers.
- Make your eggnog with low fat milk, egg substitutes and artificial sweeteners.
- Eat dark chocolate with nuts instead of milk chocolate.

How do I make time for exercise? It is always hard to fit exercise into our busy schedules when it doesn't seem to be a top priority, especially during the Holiday season. Try to do many little things during your day to increase your activity level. Try parking in the last row of the parking lot at the mall when you are doing your last minute shopping. While you are getting groceries, zigzag across the store to get what's on your list. Be sure to squat when you need something on the bottom shelf, and stand on your tip toes to get things off the top shelves. Take the stairs to the top floor of your office building instead of the elevator. While sitting at your desk, flex your abs and hold for 30 seconds. Repeat often. Sit on an exercise ball for better posture and tighter abs. Use your morning and afternoon breaks to take a walk around the office. While cleaning the house or preparing your Holiday feast, turn up the radio and dance or move to the beat. When you are taking a break to watch your favorite night time show, alternate push ups and sit ups during commercial breaks.

The key to staying healthy during this holiday season is moderation and fitness. Don't try to start a diet until the season has passed and there aren't as many temptations. Losing weight at this time of the year might be next to impossible, but by following these tips and finding time in your busy schedule to get some exercise, maintaining your weight will be a breeze. Happy Holidays!

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