

Maintaining weight during the holidays

As the holiday peak nears with cookies, eggnog, and chocolate everywhere in sight, it's easy to understand how many of us can feel trapped in an inevitable weight gain during the holiday season. If weight loss currently seems near impossible, but the aspect of at least maintaining current weight intriguing, here are some easy tips to get you going.

1. **Plan ahead.** If you have an event in the evening, set a few limits for yourself. If you know you will likely splurge on holiday goodies, make it a controlled splurge. Controlling the splurge will still let you enjoy all the treats you're craving, but won't set you a week behind come January 2nd.
2. **Eat before you go.** Never attend a party on an empty stomach. Doing so will almost always leave you with twice the amount of calories at the end of the night versus if you would have had a light healthy snack or protein drink prior to the party to help control hunger and keep away from high-calorie foods. Choose an item higher in protein content and it will help fend off carbohydrate cravings later that night.
3. **Fill up on water.** Carry around a glass of water while at a party. Water fills you up and causes you to eat less. The signals between thirst and hunger are very close in the brain and many times when you think you are hungry, you are really thirsty. Drink a full glass of water then, wait ten minutes, and often the craving will go away.
4. **Limit alcoholic beverages.** Although alcohol and parties often seems like a natural pair, it will be nearly impossible to maintain your weight if you indulge too much in them. The best option is to not drink any alcohol, but if you have decided to do so, set a limit of one or two drinks. Have a full glass of water in between each beverage. Water will help to prevent next morning dehydration and nasty holiday hangovers as well as save calories.
5. **Schedule time to exercise.** Along with all the fun of the holidays comes a massive amount of stress to get things done in time. Take 15 minutes a day to enjoy what's going on around you. A brisk daily walk not only is one of the best ways to avoid weight gain until the New Year, but you can enjoy the decorations, get away from all the commotion, and refocus on the true holiday spirit.
6. **Indulge in fun activities.** Reading books to children, making holiday decorations, playing board games, shopping with friends, and volunteering your time, are just a few of the ways you can celebrate the holidays without overeating. Giving to others takes the focus off of us, and reminds us of what the season is all about.
7. **Keep your weight loss goals in sight.** Don't lose track of why you are taking these precautionary steps. Remind yourself why a healthy weight is so important for a long healthy life. If your goal is to really focus on weight loss come January 2nd, take the first step today. Make your appointment to discuss your goals with a weight loss specialist (bariatrician) to give yourself the strongest start. Making plans now to take action will help keep the focus this holiday season so that you can start your journey to finally reaching and staying you're your goals.
8. **Get a holiday weight buster buddy.** Join forces with a friend with the same waistline budgeting goals and keep each other in check while you're at holiday get-togethers. Make a pact before social gatherings that you will be the voice of reason for each other. Just don't get annoyed when that Frosty the snowman cookie gets taken out of your hand, but have fun replacing her eggnog with a game of charades.
9. **Stay active during the holidays** and those extra pounds won't creep up on you. The holidays are about families and friends. Pick a buddy or two and use the time to spend it together as well as to help motivate you through the holidays. A 30-minute brisk walk every other day can do wonders for maintaining your waistline.
10. **Don't feel deprived.** If you tell yourself that you are "not allowed" to eat the pumpkin pie, you're going to want it all the more. If you tell others you "shouldn't have it", you're still going to want it and they're going to say it's OK to have it. Instead, try a planned splurge. Know what you are going to allow yourself ahead of time. Let them know you might try a little later, but for now you're enjoying everyone's company. Don't forget that five minutes of planning a day can save you hours of time at the gym along with lots of headaches later trying to get those pounds off.
11. **Understand why you do what you do.** Reaching towards food in times of celebration during the holidays or for comfort from sadness during the holidays is a natural thing as we have learned our entire lives since birth that food is precious and good. Infants cry and get bottles, toddlers get a vaccination shot and then a sucker, we celebrate birthdays with cakes, and the list goes on. So it's natural but not healthy. I've never met anyone yet come January second that has said anything to the effect that they were so glad they ate the quantity of food they did during November and December. You're not going to have a worse holiday season if you eat half the amount of cookies you normally would. Replacing the comfort or celebratory food with healthier more relaxing actions helps feed our minds and nourishes our bodies. Taking a brisk fall walk, nestling into a good book, or talking to a friend or relative on the phone will help a lot more than just your waistline.

Happy holidays, Dr. Julie Swindler MD