



Keeping the Holidays Healthy: Party Survival 101

It's the time of year for get-togethers with family and friends. Holidays are filled with great traditions, memories, and fun, but packing in the parties can pack on the pounds. Perhaps weight loss is not the most realistic goal during the holidays, but maintaining weight can be done with a little planning and nutrition-knowhow.

Here are some survival guidelines for your holiday food adventures:

- First and most importantly, plan ahead. You may not know exactly what will be at the buffet, but chances are high that a variety of festive treats will be around. With this in mind, make sure to think through an action plan before you arrive at the party.
- Fill yourself up in the morning with a good whole-grain breakfast that contains some protein. Perhaps cereal and yogurt, or Canadian bacon on a light whole-wheat English muffin. The fiber will take you a long way.
- During the day, DO NOT skip meals. You may be tempted to "save up" calories for the big feast, but do have a couple light meals or snacks throughout the day. Avoiding food until you reach the buffet line generally means that you will be overly hungry and more likely to "overdo" portions. Skipping meals is not only hard on your body, but who wants to arrive at the party feeling grumpy and light-headed? Try a light snack such as a bowl of soup or half a sandwich, and drink a bottle of water on the way.
- At the party, scan the buffet and decide what foods you would really enjoy. Determine to make one trip, filling up on higher protein foods and colorful fruits and vegetables. Save a little room for special holiday foods that may be either very starchy (rolls or potato casseroles) or contain a lot of fat (cream sauces or fried foods). Don't expect to cut out your holiday favorites, simply pick two or three and take a small amount of each.
- Eat SLOWLY and savor your feast. Fast-eating generally leads to overeating. Your brain cannot understand that your body is full until about 20 minutes after you begin eating. Take your time. Eating food too quickly also leads to poor digestion and heartburn. Your body will thank you for slowing down.
- To avoid grazing mindlessly, distract yourself. Walk away from the table and find friends and family to socialize with. Suggest a game or go on a walk. Occupy your hands with something non-food related; read Christmas cards or take time to help entertain the children. Purposely catch up with as many people as you can at the party.

- Eat your calories; don't drink them. One 8oz cup of eggnog contains as many as 340+ calories and 19+ grams of fat (more than 1/3 of the daily recommendation). Alcoholic beverages may not contain fat, but calorie-wise, a 5-oz glass of wine contains about 100 calories (do you have only one glass?), and sugar or fat-laden alcoholic drinks will have even more. Consider the mudslide. One 12-oz mudslide will cost you at least 800 to 1200+ calories! Even Christmas punch can pack 300+ calories per serving if it is filled with sugary sodas/juices and sherbet. Is it worth it? If calorie-filled drinks are a must-have, limit your intake and alternate with sparkling water, spritzer, or diet soda.
- Have dessert! Yes, you heard right. Do not deprive yourself, simply play it smart. Choose one or two items that you would consider indulgent. Forego the rest – if the dessert is not a masterpiece of holiday happiness, it is not worth the calories. Take a small portion; keep in mind that a 2X2-inch piece of frosted cake is 2 servings of carbohydrate plus one serving of fat. Take your treat away from the dessert table, slow down, and enjoy the look, smell, flavor, and texture of your fun food.
- With so many reasons to celebrate, stay consistent with exercise. Aim for 20 minutes or more at least 3 days per week. If you travel, airports are a great place to walk. Even holiday shopping can be a great reason to get out of the house and move around. Keeping up with exercise will help you stay in a healthy routine.

So don't strive for perfection, but do plan ahead and use moderation. This holiday season, forget the guilt and eat smart instead. Happy Holidays!