

Avoid holiday gorging and stay healthy

20 December 2016, by Ryan Hatoum



Credit: University of California, Los Angeles

A holiday celebration just isn't complete without the food. Let's face it: Family meals, office parties and holiday reunions mean we'll all have the opportunity to eat, eat, and eat some more.

And there lies the challenge: How do we avoid the trap of overeating?

Overeating can be a big problem. A recent study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that weight gained during the holidays can stick around for most of the year.

There are ways to both enjoy the holidays and keep healthy at the same time, says Erin Morse, chief clinical dietitian at the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center.

The first step is to realize that holiday foods can be healthy. Even though we tend to start reaching for comfort foods as the weather gets colder, there are plenty of nutritious, seasonal fruits and vegetables that won't wreak havoc on our waist line, says Morse. These include foods like whole cranberries, multicolored cauliflower and warming spices like nutmeg.

The next step is to set ourselves up for success during the season of eating. Morse has plenty of tips for us to plan our approach:

- Avoid the appetizer table. If you're at a party or event, don't hang out by the appetizers. You'll end up mindlessly eating while socializing.
- Go into a big meal satisfied. About an hour before you arrive at a holiday meal, where you might load up on extra helpings, try eating an apple or a cup of vegetable soup. The pectin fiber in the foods significantly increases the sensation of satiety. This may help you want to eat less at dinner.
- Don't lose sight of physical activity. Devote time to be active, especially on those days you have a holiday meal planned. Go on a family hike, walk, take the kids (or grandkids) to the playground, jog with friends, or make time for a yoga or spin class.
- Pick your battles—and your calories. Think about what's worth the calories, and then choose foods that will give you the most satisfaction. For example, avoid a plain white-flour roll and opt for sweet potato casserole instead.
- Opt for the farmers' market. When food shopping, visit your local farmers' market to see what's in season. Not only will you pick mouthwatering, healthy and sustainable foods, you'll also be supporting local farmers.
- Take initiative at the potluck. If you are bringing food to a holiday potluck, be the guest who makes a dish with healthy ingredients that are low in added sugar and salt.
- Watch out for side dishes. "Side" dishes often pack a lot of empty calories. Choose—and make—side dishes rich with flavor and nutrients. Some suggestions: homemade cranberry sauce sweetened with ripe pear and less sugar; sweet potato pie topped with walnuts instead of

marshmallows; mashed cauliflower; green bean almandine; spiced apple crumble topped with oatmeal or nuts instead of flour and butter; spiced butternut squash soup; and roasted maple Brussels sprouts.

With a little planning, your holiday season doesn't have to be a time of unhealthy eating and added weight. So don't just mindlessly eat the holidays away; savor them with good food and good company.

More information: Elina E. Helander et al. Weight Gain over the Holidays in Three Countries, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2016). DOI: [10.1056/NEJMc1602012](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMc1602012)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles
APA citation: Avoid holiday gorging and stay healthy (2016, December 20) retrieved 3 December 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-12-holiday-gorging-healthy.html>

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