Ask the Expert

Healthy Holiday Eating

How can I keep from gaining weight over the holidays?

The holiday season is synonymous with family, friends, and most importantly, food. Over-indulgence during this time seems almost inevitable. While we enjoy the flavors of this wonderful time of year, we don't enjoy buttoning our pants when it's all said and done. People generally gain about 5 pounds during the holidays. As we get older, those 5 pounds become more and more difficult to take off. And if we don't lose them, they turn into 10 pounds the next season, then 15 and so on. Just keeping these few tips in mind will help you enjoy the holidays in the same size clothes.

Don't carry on conversations near food

If the food is in the kitchen, sit in the family room. This will lessen your desire to munch while you visit.

Watch your portion sizes

The chances of each item on your plate being high in calories, fat and/or sugar is pretty high. Controlling the portions you pick will be the best way of balancing holiday eating with maintaining your weight. Use your hand as a guide. Meat should be the size of the palm of your hand. Mashed potatoes, sweet potato casserole, stuffing, rice and breads should be no more than the size of your fist (if they include high-fat ingredients, cut the portion in half). Vegetables can also be the size of your fist, unless they were made with butter or other high-fat/ calorie ingredients.

Another trick with portion control is to grab a smaller plate. Doing this gives the illusion that you have a lot of food.

Find creative ways to burn calories

We all know that the only way to keep pounds off is to burn the calories that we consume. Try not to be sedentary as much as possible. Simply standing will burn five more calories than sitting. Add in some walking in place while standing and talking to family or step side to side. Park a further distance from the house than you normally would. You may try and encourage your family to go on a walk or play an active game. Even games such as Pictionary or Charades help to burn more calories than just sitting around watching television. If you really want some fun, play with the children in the house so you have a good excuse to break a sweat. A quick reminder that it doesn't have to be constant activity to make a difference, just a little here and there will help get rid of those unwanted calories.

Beware of appetizers

If you can, avoid them and save your calories for the meal. Appetizers can provide as many calories as the actual meal, leaving you over-full and gaining weight. If you must indulge, choose wisely, by reaching for the fruit and vegetable trays, and limit yourself. Stay away from fried or high fat finger foods such as wontons or cream cheese filled pinwheels. Use dip sparingly.

Drink water and steer clear of punches and sugary beverages

Sipping water throughout the day will have a couple of benefits on your waistline. It will help to control your appetite and it will help prevent you from indulging in high-calorie sodas and other drinks. These calorie-laden drinks can add 400 -500 empty calories to your daily total. If you must indulge a little, diet sodas and flavored water will allow you to save calories for all the delicious food.

Think sugar-free

There are many wonderful recipes out there now for flavorful sugar-free desserts. Find a recipe online, make it and bring it to your holiday gathering. You'll be surprised at how good it tastes and many people will thank you for it too!

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