

[IMAGE]

Healthier Holidays

8 Ways to Keep the Pounds Off

Yes, it's another holiday season, which generally means diminishing opportunities for outdoor exercise and expanding opportunities to indulge in waistline-enlarging meals, from company parties with endless appetizers to celebratory feasts in your very own home. Independent of religious persuasion, we all celebrate something this month and next, and we tend to go overboard, which can set a dangerous course for a sedentary new you in the new year. Here are eight ways to stay committed to health without depriving yourself this holiday season:

1. You Are What You Eat: No doubt about it, healthy eating can be a struggle over the holidays. Between family and friend get-togethers to those never-ending trips to the mall, your odds of eating right drop dramatically if you don't plan accordingly. That means before you leave for that all-day mall trip, eat a healthy meal and pack some healthy snacks in case you get hungry. Big holiday dinner looming? Eat a few hours beforehand so you won't be as inclined to stuff yourself later. You can also bring a healthy main dish or side if you're the guest, or prepare a few healthy options (or even an entire meal) if you're the host.

2. Power of the Portion: Unfortunately, we live in the era of the 24-inch plate, and they often seem to be the only plate available during the holiday season. The result: Instead of sticking to your usual portion sizes, you heap scoop after scoop of your holiday favorites onto a never-ending plate, then commit yourself to finishing every bite. The healthy solution: If you're the host, set out normal-sized plates for you and your guests. If you're the guest and don't want to offend anyone by requesting a different plate, simply cut your plate in half, visually, if it's extra large so you'll end up with a standard portion size.

holiday treat - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **3. Less Is More:** When it comes to taste, the Law of Diminishing Returns applies: The more you eat, the less you generally enjoy it. That first plate titillates the senses, but by plate four, the only sense you're engaging is the sense of overwhelming fullness that comes from eating too much of a good thing. Enjoy what you're eating this holiday season by savoring every bite and recognizing that when the plate's empty, you won't go back for more.

4. Timing Is Everything: You've only seen your parents once this year and now they're here, sitting at the table right in front of you. What better time to renew the bond and catch up – while eating? Bonding is fine, but at some point, try to shift the conversation from the holiday table to the living room or elsewhere, away from the food. The longer you stay in eating mode, the greater the temptation is to eat more of what's on the table or go fill up your plate with a second or third round your body doesn't need.

5. Leftover Logic: Whether you're the host or the guest at a holiday function, use leftover logic to stay in a healthy frame of mind – and body. Leftover logic goes something like this: Only keep or take enough to feed you and/or your family for a few days, particularly if the leftovers you're faced with are high-calorie, high-fat, high-carb items. Rely on leftovers of this type for a week or so and you'll definitely pack on the pounds. So put a few sensible, healthier items in your doggie bag and move on; after all, there's likely another holiday eating opportunity right around the corner.

6. Prep Wisely: Proper meal prepping actually helps facilitate leftover logic; if you don't make too much, you won't have much left to tempt you. The wise meal preparer follows a simple rule: Consider how many people are expected to eat. Prepare enough to satisfy them fully and perhaps have small leftover portions for the next day. Simple, right? And yet so many people seem to ignore this rule entirely; thus the holiday meal featuring six pies, two turkeys and pound after pound of high-carb sides – all for a family of six and four guests.

7. Cheat a Little: After all, it is the holidays, so don't be afraid to cheat on your diet. Work too hard to "avoid" all the goodies and you'll eventually break down (perhaps during the meal itself, if not at some later point) and splurge. Healthy eating is about the long haul; it's appreciating that it takes consistent good habits to achieve health and that moderation is the key. So try a little pie and feel good about it!

8. Walk It Off: Once you've finished devouring your holiday feast (even if you ended up eating a little more than usual), follow the same strategy that's helped you get in shape in the first place: walk it off. Exercise doesn't need to get shoved under the table during the holidays, so erase "Get back into shape!" from your list of New Year's resolutions by prioritizing it. Whether that starts by organizing a post-meal game of touch football with friends and family, or just a relaxing stroll to reminisce about old times, get moving after a big holiday meal and burn off some of those extra calories.

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