

[IMAGE]

## Healthy Over The Holidays

By Meghan Vivo

Holiday season is in full swing, which means holiday eating is already causing many Americans to gain "the holiday 5." With cookies and cakes in the office, eggnog with the neighbors and one holiday party after another, tradition abounds - but no one likes the tradition of weight gain. Gaining a pound here or a pound there may not seem problematic, but according to the National Institutes of Health, most Americans never lose the weight they gain during the winter holidays. The pounds pile on year after year, making holiday weight gain an important factor in adult obesity. This year, dodge those extra pounds by following these do's and don'ts for eating healthy and staying fit over the holidays.

**Do** find healthy alternatives. The average Thanksgiving dinner has more than 2,000 calories. But you can cut down by substituting new, healthier holiday foods for the traditional favorites. Try replacing rich gravies with turkey broth, or serve sweet potatoes with a low-fat honey glaze instead of the usual helping of butter and brown sugar. You can find hundreds of creative, low-fat holiday recipes on the Internet.

**Don't** stop moving. Especially during the holidays, be sure to schedule at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity in your day. If you leave it to chance, you'll find all sorts of festive reasons to skip your workout. If you have a regular exercise time, keep it up. If you don't, buddy up with a walking partner.

Family sitting down to carve the turkey on Thanksgiving. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark But, you say, "Where do I find the time?" One of the best ways to find time to exercise is to cut down on television. Your entire family will benefit from replacing the sitcoms and video games with new holiday traditions. Take a brisk walk through the neighborhood with family or visiting relatives to look at holiday decorations, or hike, bike, cross-country ski or snowshoe in a nearby park, nature reserve or national park. Remember, *any* exercise is better than no exercise.

**Do** bring your own dish. If you're going to a party or office potluck, prepare a low-calorie dish you know you'll like. This way, at least you know there's one thing you can feel good about eating. If you're cooking the holiday meal, be a health-conscious hostess by offering vegetable side dishes (without the butter or

sauce) in addition to stuffing or mashed potatoes. You also can set out bite-sized, healthy snacks like popcorn, fruit, nuts, raisins, or celery and carrots.

**Don't** skip meals. Skipping meals means you arrive hungry and drastically increase your chances of bingeing at the holiday dinner table. Treat the holiday like a regular day and eat all of your normal meals and snacks. Have a nutritious snack like juice, whole-grain crackers or a slice of cheese and lots of water before arriving at a party, and start the big holiday meal with a salad instead of bread to add to your vegetable quotient.

**Do** pace yourself. When you arrive at a party, take your time making your way to the snack table. Set limits for yourself by eating slowly, putting your fork down after each bite and keeping track of the number of hors d'oeuvres you eat. Alcohol also has loads of calories, so pace yourself and be discerning with your beverage choices. For chocolate lovers, nonfat hot chocolate can be a festive, low-calorie treat.

**Don't** have a diet mentality. The holidays are one of the few times you may have to accept the next best thing to staying on your perfect diet. But if you let yourself go "off" your diet around the holidays, you'll go way off the deep end, and rather than having a slice of pie, you'll rationalize eating the whole pie. If you can't completely avoid your favorite holiday treats, indulge only on occasion rather than all or none of the time. Trying to lose weight during the holidays will be an uphill battle, but you can certainly maintain and even lose a few pounds in preparation for the holidays.

### **Healthy Holiday Cooking Tips From NBC's "Biggest Loser"**

Stuffed and cooked turkey on a platter. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Turkey**

- Use a rack to roast the turkey so the fat drips away from the bird
- If you're roasting a whole turkey, bake the stuffing in a casserole outside the bird. Stuffing baked inside the bird absorbs fat from the turkey.
- Include as many chopped vegetables as possible in the stuffing and use a nonstick pan to minimize the amount of oil required to cook them.
- If you're using broth for stuffing or gravy, be sure to choose fat-free.
- Use a fat separator to skim off all fat before making your gravy. This tool is easy to find in most stores. It looks like a liquid measuring cup, but the spout comes from the bottom of the cup so the fat stays behind as you pour the liquid (fat-free) from the bottom.

**342:** The average number of calories in a one-cup serving of egg-nog. Each delicious cup also contains 18 grams of fat.

### Miscellaneous

- Season vegetables with fresh herbs and low sodium seasonings, and skip the butter.
- Skip the dinner rolls. If that's not an option for your family, buy whole-grain rolls.
- Cut down on saturated fat in creamy sauces and dressings by mixing in nonfat or low-fat plain yogurt.
- Mash potatoes with chicken broth and canned, evaporated, skimmed milk instead of butter.
- Use low-fat canned cream soup in the traditional green bean casserole.

### Pumpkin Pie or Sweet Potato Pie

- Use cooked mashed sweet potato to substitute for pumpkin in your favorite pumpkin pie recipe if you favor sweet potato over pumpkin.
- Make pumpkin (or sweet potato) pies with canned, evaporated, skimmed milk. Much of the water has been "evaporated" so the remaining milk is more concentrated, making it rich and creamy with lower calories and fat than regular evaporated milk.
- Try to use half the amount of sugar requested in the recipe, substitute brown sugar for white sugar and if you have access, try using agave nectar as your sweetener (available at health food stores). Unlike sugar, it's loaded with antioxidants and is *natural* rather than artificial or chemically processed.
- Substitute most or all of the whole eggs with egg whites.
- Eat just the filling of the finished pie and skip the high-fat crust. Or, if no one else minds, bake the filling in a springform pan without any crust at all.

**27** Grams of fat in a typical 1/8 slice of a 9-inch homemade pecan pie. Each serving also contains 502 calories.

Basket of muffins and rolls. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Do** make a plan. The best way to avoid overindulgences is going into the holiday season with a plan - know where you're going, what temptations lie ahead and know how you're going to deal with them. Decide in advance whether you'll splurge for a day, stick to a strict diet plan or enjoy only small portions of your favorite foods. If you trust yourself to take one bite of something and stop, you can sample a selection of desserts. If you can't stop at one bite, pick the most appealing dessert option and stick with it.

**Don't** focus on food. If you're like most people, a holiday means eating, watching television or resting, and eating some more. But it's important to balance the celebration of food with a celebration of family and friends. Take a break and play football or Frisbee with the family between television shows or after the big holiday dinner. Or how about starting a new family tradition? The family walk. Being active not only burns calories, but also puts you in the right mindset to control your eating.

#### **Nutrition Information for Popular Holiday Foods and Drinks:**

- Spoonfull of cranberry sauce. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Cranberry sauce, 1 slice, 1/2-inch thick, 86 calories, 0 g fat
- Stuffing, 1/2 cup, 178 calories, 8.6 g fat
- Dark-meat turkey, no skin, 3.5 oz., 187 calories, 7.2 g fat
- Gravy, 1/4 cup, 30 calories, 2 g fat
- Homemade pumpkin pie, 1/8 of a 9-inch pie, 316 calories, 14 g fat
- Brussels sprouts, plain with salt, 1/2 cup serving, 31 calories, 0 g fat
- Carrots, plain with salt, 1/2 cup serving, 26 calories, 0 g fat

#### **Break Out Those Workout Shoes**

Number of Calories Burned by Activity (for a 150-pound person, on average):

- Elliptical trainer (general): 648 calories/hour
- Stairmaster: 432 calories/hour
- Running (11.5 min/mile): 648 calories/hour
- Walking (17 min/mile): 288 calories/hour

**60:** The average number of minutes you would need to spend on a stationary bike (at moderate level) to burn off that pecan pie. A 150-pound person burns an average of 504 calories in this time.

Woman power walking through autumn backroad. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Do** limit portion sizes. Portion size is important all year round, but special attention should be paid when you have dozens of options over a course of holidays. Even healthy foods in large quantities can make you pack on the pounds. If you watch portion sizes and make an effort to fill up on healthier alternatives, you can enjoy

one or two of your favorite high-fat indulgences without the guilt, or the weight gain. At dinner, plan to fill a quarter of your plate with lean protein like white-meat turkey, half of your plate with vegetables such as green beans and salad, and a quarter of your plate with carbohydrates like unbuttered yams or stuffing. And don't go back for seconds! If you've taken a portion of turkey, mashed potatoes or pie that is larger than your fist or a deck of cards, it's too big.

**Don't** overbook yourself. Although the holidays are a time of joy and generosity, they also can be a source of tremendous stress. To keep yourself energized for the winter months, be sure to get enough sleep and spend your time on the things you value most. Remember the spirit of the season and let yourself enjoy this time. If you start feeling overcommitted, say no to any low-priority engagements. If possible, take 15 minutes each day to be alone, stretch, read or just decompress. And if your to-do list becomes too long, delegate tasks and divide them over the course of a week. A couple of tasks a day is much more manageable than trying to do everything at once.

We look forward to the holidays all year. So go to the parties, the feasts, the cook-offs. But in the midst of all the bustle and gift-giving, don't forget your gift to yourself - the gift of good health.

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