

Healthy Eating during the Holidays Takes Planning

by Mark Ferguson – awesome HDC volunteer

It's a festive time of year, but are you dreading the holidays because of all the opportunities to overindulge on food and drink? Office and family parties and other holiday social events make it challenging to stay healthy.

“Because of all the added social engagements, our routines get knocked off track,” says Mary Schreiner, MPH, who has worked in health promotion and weight management Colorado Health Sciences Center. “Some people approach the holidays with reckless abandon, and they add five to 10 pounds. The extra weight is not only staring at them from the scales at the beginning of the New Year, but it also makes them feel miserable because all the added salt, sugar and fat that have stressed out their hearts and brains.”



Schreiner says that a healthier – and more sensible – approach to staying healthy during the holidays is to use the following points to develop a workable and realistic plan:

- 1. Don't try to be perfect. You're human and will fail.** Planning on being "good" for 80 percent of the time allows you to "cheat" a bit the other 20 percent. There needs to be a margin for error, so that if you go overboard in eating and drinking (even non-alcoholic drinks can have lots of calories), you can get back on track the next day and count the overdoing episode as part of the 20 percent. “It's not what we eat and drink at one meal that makes us overweight,” says Schreiner, “but what we are doing on a daily basis that adds those pounds.”
- 2. Don't look for a reason to go off your plan.** For some people, one misstep gives them a reason to fall off the wagon. “Oh well,” they might think to themselves, “I ate a piece of cake that wasn't in my plan. I might as well really blow it now.” Better instead to consider if that piece of cake is really worth going off-plan. “Hopefully,” Schreiner says, “the next time temptation hits, they will stop and consider the worthiness of eating yet another piece before they pick up a fork.”
- 3. Remind yourself that you will have many opportunities during the holidays to eat really yummy treats.** Schreiner says that reminding yourself of this simple fun fact may take some of the stress out of holiday eating and help you focus instead on these healthy-eating strategies:
 - Don't eat junk food during the holidays that you can eat during the other 11 months of the year, especially chips, candy, cheese and packaged cookies.
 - Enjoy special seasonal treats, such as holiday cookies and special appetizers.
 - At parties that have buffets, allow yourself to taste up to three special foods. Look around the serving tables beforehand and choose the three that look most interesting.
 - Avoid fried foods, creamy (white or yellow) sauces, foods swimming in gravy, and creamy drinks.
 - Instead of using a serving spoon when dishing up foods, use a teaspoon or tablespoon to ensure that you're taking smaller portions.
 - Use smaller plates to make it look to you as though you actually have more food.
 - Don't hang around the serving or buffet table. Once you've served yourself, move into another room or sit down at a table to eat.

- Fill up on fruits and vegetables first before going to higher-calorie foods. Cutting your hunger with fruits and vegetables is wise, and you'll feel more in control when dishing up other foods later.
- If you're not sure that fruits or vegetables will be served at a party, eat a salad or have a small bowl of soup or a smoothie beforehand.
- Enjoy a large glass of water when first arriving at a party. People are often dehydrated this time of year and that first drink goes down quickly. Satisfy your thirst first with water, then it will be easier to drink other drinks more slowly later.
- If drinking alcohol or calorie-laden drinks, alternate them with glasses of water.



- 4. Remember to eat on a regular basis during the holidays.** People often “save” their calories by not eating breakfast or lunch, but they are so hungry in the evening that they overdo the eating and end up consuming many more calories than if they had eaten normally during the day. “Allowing yourself to get too hungry ensures that your willpower will fail,” Schreiner says. “Eat something every three or four hours – fruits and vegetables are great choices.”
- 5. The other half of staying healthy during the holidays is exercise.** Ideally, some sort of exercise, activity or movement should be part of your daily routine, and it doesn't need to be anything formal. Pedometers are a good way to track how far you're walking (at least 5,000 steps as a daily minimum, with 10,000 recommended). Increasing the distance you walk can be as simple as parking further away from work or stores, walking a circuit around the mall before entering a store, or taking the stairs. Exercise is more fun with a friend who wants to walk or take a class with you. At home, exercise DVDs, dancing, and housework workouts are additional ways to stay fit. Other possibilities include signing up for a holiday walk/run, volunteering at a kitchen that serves the homeless, or planning for a scavenger hunt, walk or skating party as part of a holiday party.



Even when it's not the holidays, people tend to eat out of stress, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, or sadness. So it's especially important during the holidays, says Schreiner, to take time for yourself and do something that you enjoy and doesn't involve food, such as soaking in the tub, getting a massage, taking a yoga class, doing something nice for someone, or making yourself laugh.

“Remember that parties, especially during the holidays, are really for the chance to see old friends and to get together with family, not so that you may eat more high-calorie foods,” Schreiner says. “So, talk

a lot at parties. Mothers teach their kids not speak with their mouths full of food, *so talking more at parties means eating less.*”