

Health tip: Healthier ways for the holidays

The holidays may be a challenging time to stay healthy – both physically and mentally. With holiday parties full of decadent food and drinks and busy schedules that may not allow time for our normal routines, we may find it difficult to make healthier decisions. We may find ourselves overindulging, leading to holiday weight gain. The holidays are also a stressful time for many. Overbooked schedules, spending time with difficult family members, dealing with loss, and overspending on holiday gifts may all lead to increased stress. With a little forethought and planning ahead, however, it is possible to embrace and enjoy the holiday season.



Tips for healthier holiday eating¹

1. Don't skip meals. Skipping a meal with the goal of saving calories prior to a holiday event may often backfire and lead to overeating.
2. Contribute a healthier dish. Ensure at least one nutritious choice is available at potlucks.
3. Choose your splurges. Scan the buffet or dinner table and choose a couple holidays favorites to splurge on instead of foods that you may have any other day of the year.
4. Think color. Make a plate look festive by including fruits and veggies. Aim to cover half your plate.
5. Choose beverages wisely. Limit alcohol, which is high in calories. Liquors, sweet wines and mixed drinks contain 150 to 450 calories per glass. Choose instead water or seltzer, infuse water with seasonal fruit, lemon, or cinnamon or try a hot or green tea with honey.



Consider a budget friendly holiday³

Have a plan when it comes to holiday spending so you don't overextend yourself. The plan may include creating a budget or could be to find a way to make more money – pick up extra hours at work, get an extra seasonal job, or clean out your basement or garage and sell unwanted items. Whatever you choose, having a plan helps us feel that we have some control over our lives, and that we're empowered.

Some considerations for holiday spending:

- Create a budget and stick to it
- Suggest a gift exchange
- If traveling, book early and consider traveling during off-season peak hours
- Get creative with gift-giving
- Start traditions that are lower in cost, such as a drive to look at holiday lights



Tips for coping with holiday stress^{2,4}

In addition to holiday eating, stress may result in overindulging. While the holiday season may be a time of joy, it may also be hectic and stressful. To cope with this stress, prepare yourself in the following ways:

1. Create a game plan. Spend a little time up front getting organized. Make a list of what you need to buy. Try to shop ahead of time and if you will be cooking, plan your menu.
2. Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no may leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you cannot participate in every project or activity.
3. Make time for your health. In the holiday rush, don't let your well-being fall by the wayside. Try to stay on your normal sleep schedule and get regular exercise. If you can't find a 30-minute chunk of time for exercise, break it up into three 10-minute sessions spread through the day.
4. Give yourself a break. Amid doing things for others, it's easy to forget to take care of ourselves. If you feel stress building up, get away for a few minutes. Find a quiet corner and do some deep breathing. Listen to calming music, or just sit.
5. Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.



Focus on mindfulness²

1. Accept imperfection. Before the holidays, acknowledge things may not go exactly as planned. It's okay to not be perfect
2. Where does this fit in the grand scheme of things? Don't let the long grocery line spoil your afternoon.
3. Respond with kindness. You cannot change how others act, but you may change how you respond to situations.
4. See if you may extend an act of kindness to those you know are without family and friends during this time of year.

**United
Healthcare**

Sources:

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 5 Healthy Eating Tips for the Holidays (cdc.gov) 2020. Accessed September 2022.

² Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544> 2021. Accessed September 2022

³ Bank Rate. 10 Ways To Save Money During The Holidays | Bankrate 2021. Accessed September 2022.

⁴ UT Southwestern Medical Center. 7 ways to manage family stress during the holidays | Mental Health | UT Southwestern Medical Center (utswmed.org) 2021. Accessed September 2022