

8 Ways to Avoid Holiday Weight Gain

According to , there are only 49 days, 12 hours, and 51 minutes left 'til Christmas! That is a *LOT* of time to celebrate, shop, and, let's be honest, overindulge on all things baked with sugar and spice and everything nice.

Between the time stores cram their aisles with sticky slews of Halloween candy and the moment they finally remove the last gingerbread man from their pastry case, Americans will have spent over \$2 billion on candy and other sweet treats. With that in mind, it's no wonder the average American gains 1-2 pounds during the holidays and—here's the kicker—doesn't lose it in the new year. Multiply 1 or 2 pounds by 5 or 10 years, and we can easily see how many middle-aged adults are well overweight.

This time of year, I often hear people joke about how thankful they are that the holiday season happens to occur during the cold-weather months. Therefore, they can rely on sweatpants and hoodies to conceal the fact that, when it comes to their eating habits, they're on Santa's "Naughty" list. But the fact is, we don't have to be naughty.

Simultaneously being "nice" and feeling satisfied (not deprived!) *is* possible ... and your sweats can be reserved for gym sessions only! Here are my top tips for staying slim 'til Santa comes:

1. Eat before you eat. I know, I know, how can eating before you eat keep unwanted pounds at bay? If you eat a healthy, satisfying snack before attending your fifth Christmas party of the month, you'll be less likely to indulge in a plateful of high-calorie finger foods and decadent desserts. A half-hour or so before you walk out the door, eat a small meal that

is high in appetite-suppressing protein. I personally prefer Greek yogurt or a protein shake that is free of artificial sweeteners, which can promote cravings. Other options might include an egg white omelet with salsa and veggies, cottage cheese and an apple (high-fiber foods will also keep you feeling full!), or 3-4 ounces of turkey or chicken.

2. Bring your own healthy dish. Once you arrive to Temptation Island, aka, the Christmas party or Thanksgiving dinner, it's wise to be armed with your own healthy side dish lest you unwittingly end up consuming a day's worth of calories in one sitting. Preparing your own dish will a.) Likely be greatly appreciated by your hosts, b.) Likely be appreciated by other health-minded merry-makers like yourself, and c.) Provide a balanced meal that will give your body the nutrients it needs while fending off the guilt and excess food it doesn't.

3. Use a smaller plate. This is of course easier to do when you're at your own home and can select which plate to use, but if you have a choice, always eat from a small plate during the holidays. The brain associates a big blank space on the plate with less food, which may prompt you to pile on two or three servings instead of one, or encourage you to go back for seconds. And obviously, smaller plates require smaller, adequate portions.

4. Make healthier options. If you and/or your family are craving gingerbread men, pumpkin bread, peppermint patties and the like, hop online and search for healthier versions of these holiday favorites. Recently, I've been loving experimenting with Kodiak Cakes pancake and baking mix, which is made with whole grains and also offers gluten-free and high-protein varieties.

A few of my favorite ingredient alternatives for "healthifying" baked goods are:

- Almond milk or cashew milk for whole milk

- Unsweetened applesauce for half the amount of oil the recipe calls for
- Two egg whites for each whole egg
- Olive oil cooking spray instead of butter, shortening, or oil to help with sticking
- Low fat cottage cheese (puréed until smooth) instead of full-fat cream cheese
- Cacao nibs instead of chocolate chips

5. Three words: 'No, thank you.' Don't let your twinkly-eyed, rosy-cheeked grandmother or your pushy mom pressure you into cleaning your plate or having a second slice of pecan pie. It is 100 percent OK to respectfully decline. Just because everyone else may be doing it doesn't mean you should. In fact, it may be that you can serve as a positive example! Enjoy in moderation, and then stay committed to your goal of enjoying a healthy holidays.

6. Make Tupperware your best friend. If hosting at your house, make sure you have plenty of Tupperware on hand with which to pile leftovers into and send away with your guests! Having Grandma's World Famous Sugar Cookies on display in your kitchen won't do your waistline any favors.

7. Get minty. After you eat, pop a mint, piece of gum or one of those super-strong Listerine PocketPacs into your mouth. Having that fresh, just-brushed taste will dissuade you from overeating. Chewing gum while you cook is also a great way to distract your mouth from mindless snacking and "taste testing."

8. Just do it and move on. Last but not least, eat the cookie! Or the slice of apple pie, the piece of red velvet cake, the gooey brownie, whatever it is! It's much better to acknowledge cravings instead of shoving them out of mind as that often leads to bingeing later. Indulging a craving, as long as it's in moderation, will nix the desire for it.

Forbidding a favorite food during the holiday season will only make it more irresistible. If you still feel cravings after you partake, do something to get your mind off it, such as calling a friend, going for a walk, or watching a Christmas movie. Research shows that daydreaming about pleasant activities or scenes can reduce the intensity of food cravings.

I hope you find these tips helpful! If you have any questions or need more tips, reach out to me on Twitter @dandersontyler or Instagram @dianaandersontyler. {eoa}

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