

How to Avoid Gaining 10 Pounds During the Holidays

At the risk of sounding like Ebenezer Scrooge, I will state unequivocally that I dislike the holidays. From sunup on Thanksgiving until sundown on New Year's, I am provided with unparalleled **high-calorie** grazing options and numerous chocolate-consuming opportunities. These memorable moments in munching are the recipe for **diet disaster**.

The task of keeping my **weight** in check and my thighs to a minimum is complicated by my "friends" who inconsiderately bake calorie-laden treats, slap them on a festively decorated **holiday plate** and then give them to me! They apparently assume that I don't mind having my derriere look like two humongous hot air balloons stuck together.

For 11 months of the year, my nondomestic friends complain about cooking. I see their messy kitchens stocked with Tuna Helper. They consider a meal to be labor intensive if it involves stopping the microwave to rotate the tray.

For 11 months of the year, these friends are sane, budget-conscious women, scouring the grocery ads and clipping coupons. But when the holidays approach—seduced by enticing, glossy, close-up magazine photos—their domestic genes froth up like cappuccino foam, and they willingly spend several hundred dollars on one cookie recipe alone. The ingredients are always exotic, and the directions are like something out of a deliverance manual:

"Over a low fire in a copper-coated double boiler, melt 4 pounds unsalted, whipped butter and 1 package distilled Dutch chocolate. Stir in 1 bag dehydrated lemon syrup, 1 cup imported marshmallow paste and 2 tablespoons of licorice root extract."

These recipes frequently have compound hyphenated names such as Double-Chocolate-Fudge-Creme-Mocha-Nougat-Filled Dainties and require bizarre kitchen utensils that can be leased only from Martha Stewart with several months' advance notice and a large deposit:

"After roasting the chestnuts on an open fire, extract each nut whole from the shell by placing them one at a time in the teak-handled, brass-tipped nut nippers. Raise the nippers in a smooth motion over your head and while balancing on your left foot, gently squeeze the teak handles with a pulsing motion."

These are the kinds of high-calorie extravaganzas that my domestically impaired friends frequently whip up in triple batches during the holidays. As the ungrateful recipient, I have three options: 1) throw them away, 2) give them away or 3) eat them.

Option No. 1 is out. My mother has convinced me that no food may be thrown out for any reason.

I have tried option No. 2—giving them away—but then I get recipe requests I can't fill or questions that make me look stupid.

Once, I lost track of the origin of a fruitcake and actually gave it as a gift back to its maker. This culinary *faux pas* left me embarrassed and the giver-recipient speechless (unless tears count as speech).

This leaves option No. 3 by default: I eat them. I eat all of them, frequently in one sitting, and then I lick the crumbs off the festively decorated holiday plates. Afterwards, I slink to my scale like a guilty dog with its tail tucked between its legs. Criminals are no more terrified of the electric chair than I am of my bathroom scale!

By mid-December, my cellulite gets so thick and dimply that from the knees up, my pantyhose appear to be stuffed with

cottage cheese. When I catch a glimpse in the full-length mirror (which I hang horizontally so I can check my girth from thigh to thigh), I am disgusted with myself, with my friends and especially with those enticing holiday recipes.

Humbug!

This year I have a preholiday request for all well-wishing friends: If I'm on your Christmas list and you are baking holiday cookies, please, please give them to someone else!

If you still feel charitably inclined, purchase a few boxes of SnackWells, empty them onto a festively decorated, lick-proof holiday plate and leave them on my doorstep.

I'll be in the bathroom, cowering by my scale.

Jackie Macgirvin *is a freelance writer.*