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Avoid **Holiday** Weight Gain

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Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Holiday Strategies for Not Overeating</u>	5
<u>Holiday Strategies for Cutting Calories</u>	10
<u>Holiday Strategies for Reducing Stress</u>	12

Avoid **Holiday** Weight Gain

Trying to lose weight during the holiday season can be tough. Not only does the entire season seem to revolve around food, it revolves around extremely high calorie, high fat, and sugary food.

Add in alcoholic beverages, lots of candy, cakes, pies, cookies, and eggnog, and you can be almost guaranteed to gain 5 pounds or more by the time the New Year rolls around.

Many people would love to continue losing weight through the holiday season (if they've already been following a weight loss plan) - but many others would be satisfied by not gaining any weight. Whether you intend to keep losing weight, or just avoid gaining weight this holiday season, you'll love what we're about to share with you.

This guide contains excellent tips for eating less, cutting calories, and reducing stress during the holidays. You'll learn how to make healthy substitutions, how to keep a positive attitude so stress doesn't take over your mind (and store fat on your body), and tons of great strategies for reducing calories and keeping your appetite under control.

Let's face it; you don't have control over many aspects of the holiday season. For example, you may attend parties where

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someone else did all of the cooking. You may be faced with some of the richest, most fattening foods on the planet. You may be stressed and rushed, which doesn't leave a lot of time for cooking healthy meals or exercising.

You may even have to deal with deliberate saboteurs who know you are trying to watch your weight and find great delight in putting irresistible temptations in front of you. Maybe you are even your own worst enemy. Maybe despite your best efforts you just can't seem to control yourself when there are so many festive, delicious foods available.

There's no sense denying the facts - it's hard to stick to a healthy eating plan during the holidays. But it doesn't have to be that hard - especially when you know some powerful tricks and strategies to help you eat less, cut calories, and stay calm during busy, chaotic times.

In the next several pages we're going to share a lot of great tips for losing weight or maintaining your weight throughout the holiday season. Some of the tips might not apply to you personally if you don't have that particular problem. Obviously, your best bet is to make note of the ones that will work best for you and don't worry about the rest.

Even if you feel they would all work great for you, keep in mind that you don't have to apply ALL of them to see results. If you feel overwhelmed about applying all of them at once, start with some of the bigger changes and add others when you feel ready.

Read on for some easy and effective holiday healthy eating tips:

Holiday Strategies for Not Overeating

One of the most effective things you can do to avoid gaining weight and make losing weight a lot easier is to reduce the volume of food you eat. But that is sometimes easier said than done, right? Especially during the holiday season - there is so much food, so little time!

Believe it or not, it's not all that hard to reduce how much you eat. Take a look at the tips below for some simple strategies that work:

Natural Appetite Control

One of the best ways to control your appetite without harmful drugs or stimulants is to eliminate sugar and simple carbohydrates from your diet and replace them with lean protein and fiber in the form of lean meats, vegetables and whole grains. Drinking plenty of water also helps. The less hungry you feel, the easier it will be to resist temptation.

Keep Your Tummy Busy

Another great way to avoid overeating is by eating smaller meals and snacks frequently throughout the day. Eating more frequently seems like it would cause you to eat more calories, but not if you choose mostly low calorie fare like vegetables, fruit, small amounts of whole grains, and lean protein. You'll feel like you're eating a lot, and therefore feel satisfied and less tempted to munch on high calorie goodies.

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Fill Up on Water

Drinking a glass of water before each meal, and also sipping water throughout the day is another great way to eat less because you'll feel satisfied with much less food. This is also a great way to reduce persistent cravings for food! Did you know that very often when you have cravings for food, you are actually craving more water? Try a little experiment the next time you keep craving something - drink a full glass of water and watch the craving disappear.

Think Quality, Not Quantity

Whole, natural foods are so much better for you than refined, processed, chemical-laden foods! Even better, when you eat mostly natural, whole foods, you end up eating a lot less because you aren't trying to satisfy phantom hunger brought on by chemical reactions and blood sugar fluctuations.

Smaller Portions . . . of Everything

Whether you are eating a salad at home, or a fancy dinner at a company Christmas party, keep in mind that smaller portions are better. Almost always, your eyes are bigger than your stomach and you don't need as much food as you think you do to feel satisfied. Start with just a spoonful or so of the many dishes you want to try.

If your meal is delivered to your table and you can't control the portion sizes, at least split up the portions and eat half or one third of each food. This is one of the easiest ways to eat less without feeling deprived.

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Be the One in Control

When you start craving something that you don't want to eat, or you start craving more of something you've already sampled, ask yourself, "How badly do I really want that? Am I craving it because it's there, or because other people are enjoying it? What would happen if I decided not to eat it?" Usually, questions like these will strengthen your awareness that YOU are the one in charge, not the food. And that is often enough to help you overcome cravings.

Stay Conscious When Eating

While you are eating, be sure you don't slip into "mindless munching mode". Stay conscious and aware of what's going into your mouth, and how much of it you've consumed. This is also why taking smaller portions is helpful - you can't overeat it if it's not there on your plate! If you overindulge, at least make a conscious decision to do so and be willing to take responsibility for your choice.

Fill Up Before a Gathering

Before you leave for a party or dinner, eat something healthy yet filling, like a banana, or a small spinach salad with extra virgin olive oil drizzled over the top, or even a small protein shake. You'll be ingesting a small amount of calories, but you'll find it much easier to stay in control at the gathering.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

At home, be sure not to leave dishes of candy, chips, pretzels, cookies or any other foods out in the open. You'll be much more

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tempted to grab some every time you pass by them. Put all foods out of sight and you won't think about them nearly as often.

Don't Sit Near Food Platters

Similarly, when you attend holiday gatherings, be sure not to sit right next to stations of food. Choose a spot that puts the appetizers and other goodies out of arm's reach. If you have to stand up and walk across the room to eat, you're less likely to overdo it.

Single Helpings Only

When eating meals, make a commitment to have a single serving only - no seconds! Take only one serving of each dish you want to try, and make even those single servings modest in size. This is a great way to control how much you eat without feeling like you're being deprived.

Buffet Smarts

When eating at a buffet that features a wide array of delicious dishes, remember that you don't have to sample everything. Choose a few of the items you REALLY want to try, and take just a sample of each (enough for 3 or 4 bites).

Don't Skip Meals

Don't be tempted to skip meals all day so you can eat more at an evening party. You'll be so hungry by the time you get there that you'll probably eat many more calories than you would by eating a few small, healthy meals and indulging just a little at the party.

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Eat Sweet Treats Only at Parties

During the holiday season, make an agreement with yourself that you can enjoy dessert or the occasional cookie - but only while attending a party or gathering. Make them off-limits at home and at work. Considering that most people only attend a handful of events throughout the entire holiday season, this is an easy way to indulge occasionally without overindulging.

Chew Slowly and Savor Every Bite

No matter what you are eating, get into the habit of chewing very slowly, taking your time, and enjoying every bite of food you put into your mouth. Pay attention to the flavor, the texture, the temperature, the spices and seasonings used in cooking, and other details. Really notice how good the food tastes, and how good you feel as you eat it.

Pause between bites, sip some water, and pay attention to how your stomach feels. Avoid eating past the point of comfort. It's the best way to feel fully satisfied after every meal and snack, while also consuming fewer calories.

Brush Your Teeth

Brush your teeth after every meal so you won't be tempted to keep eating. When you go out, bring one of those little disposable toothbrushes that don't require water. After eating a meal at a party, slip into the restroom and brush your teeth. Besides making your breath smell fresh, you'll be much less tempted to eat and drink more afterward.

Holiday Strategies for Cutting Calories

Not only is it important to eat less, it's important to reduce the overall number of calories you consume each day. Does that mean you're stuck eating lettuce salads while everyone else enjoys your favorite foods? Thankfully not. There are plenty of great ways to reduce calories without sacrificing flavor or giving up your favorite foods.

Eat Vegetables First

You can enjoy your favorite foods, but the trick in controlling calories is to eat less of them. One good way to do that is by getting into the habit of eating your vegetables first, before starting on the main course or higher calorie side dishes.

When eating at a buffet, fill half of your plate with low calorie, high fiber vegetables. When you sit down to eat, eat those first. The high fiber content of the vegetables helps fill you up so you end up eating less of the high calories foods, and you take in fewer calories overall.

Healthy Substitutions

When preparing and cooking food, substitute some healthier options, like these examples:

- Use two egg whites to replace one whole egg.
- Unsweetened applesauce to replace the oil in baked goods.
- Use other natural or artificial sweeteners to replace sugar, or simply reduce the amount of sugar you use.
- Use cocoa powder instead of unsweetened baking chocolate.
- Use stevia or artificial sweeteners in icing and for flavoring.
- Replace fatty cuts of meat with leaner cuts.

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- Use low fat or skim dairy products instead of regular.
- Steam vegetables instead of frying or sautéing.
- Replace salt with spices when cooking, and avoid adding extra salt to meals.

Watch the Extras

Every holiday table contains high calorie “extras” like cranberry sauce, gravy, salad dressing and biscuits or dinner rolls. Watch your intake of these and keep them to minimum if you want to avoid taking in too many calories.

Be a Healthy Host or Hostess

When hosting a holiday party at your home, create a large fruit and vegetable platter to serve in addition to the other typical holiday fare. Not only can you munch on it to avoid eating too many goodies, plenty of your guests will probably appreciate having healthier options too.

Make Healthy Contributions

When you attend a pot-luck or buffet dinner, ask the host or hostess if it's okay for you to bring something. If so, create some healthy and delicious contributions that everyone will enjoy. A fruit and veggie platter is great; or a festive, colorful salad (fruit or vegetable); low calorie, high fiber soup; a bean dish - there are plenty of options that are healthy and still taste great.

There are thousands of great recipes online if you can't think of anything - do some research on great low-calorie party foods and you'll find tons of them.

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Stay Ahead of the Game

Rather than overdoing it at parties and regretting it for days, you might want to plan ahead and put some strategies in place so that when you do overindulge a little bit, you'll already be ahead of the game.

Some good example strategies:

- Getting a good workout in every morning so you burn more calories all day.
- Watch your diet carefully when you're not at parties and gatherings.
- Having healthy food options ready to eat and strategically placed in your refrigerator and cupboards.
- Hiding the richer, more fattening foods far in the back so they won't be in your face every time you want to eat.

Avoid Liquid Calories

It's bad enough that we're faced with rich holiday foods everywhere we go, but there is no shortage of high-calorie beverages either. Soda pop, sweet tea, Irish coffee, Grande lattes - oh, and don't forget eggnog, which contains more than 300 calories and 19 grams of fat in one cup! (And that's without alcohol added.)

Keeping your caloric intake down during the holiday season is much easier if you avoid drinking a lot of calories in beverages. Stick to water except for occasional treats here and there.

Holiday Strategies for Reducing Stress

Hopefully by now you see just how easy it can be to make a few

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simple changes and stay on track with your weight goals - while still enjoying yourself at parties, dinners, and other holiday gatherings. You don't have to be a saint and you don't have to feel deprived; you simply need to stay aware and make common-sense decisions moment to moment.

Now we'll move on to stress management strategies. Stress is one of the most common triggers that make people overeat, and it only gets worse during the holiday season. Maybe your life is stressful already, or maybe you're one of the lucky few who enjoy a calm life. Either way, you could experience elevated levels of stress before, during and after the holiday season.

Most of this stress is related to being busy. You've got shopping to do, gifts to buy, greeting cards to send, food to prepare, gifts to wrap, decorations that need to be put up. If you also host a dinner or party of some kind, you've got to create a menu, cook all of the food, and prepare your home for guests. You may also feel pressured financially, stressed by traffic on the streets and crowds of shoppers in stores . . . there are plenty of things that can leave you feeling exhausted and frazzled.

Unfortunately, many people respond to these stressful circumstances by eating more. If that has been a pattern for you too, definitely take a look at the strategies below. We're going to show you plenty of ways to calm down, release stress, and feel great while keeping on track with your healthy eating goals.

Rest Well!

The very first thing to do is make sure you are getting enough sleep each night. You may be tempted to cut back on sleep so you have more time to accomplish everything on your "to-do" list, but don't do it! Think about how you feel when you don't get enough sleep:

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cranky, irritable, fatigued, and impatient. When you're well rested, you feel energetic, alert, optimistic, and resilient. You will accomplish a lot more in less time if you've had enough sleep. This is one of the most important things you can do to manage stress!

Breathe Deeply

When you notice that you're feeling stressed, rushed, or overwhelmed, stop for a few minutes and take several slow, deep breaths. Say to yourself mentally with each exhalation, "Relax, relax, relax". Within just a couple of minutes you'll start to feel calmer, reducing the temptation to drink alcohol or overeat to deal with the stress.

This is also a great technique for neutralizing cravings. If that plate of Christmas cookies keeps jumping up and waving to get your attention, close your eyes, take a few slow, deep breaths, and say to yourself, "I don't need those; I'm not even hungry right now. I can have some later, but right now I choose not to eat them." Doing this consistently helps you feel more in control, rather than battling constant cravings.

Keep Your Goals a Priority

With all of the holiday craziness and temptations, it's easy to stop thinking about your weight loss goals (or weight maintenance goals). When you stop focusing on the importance of your goals, it gets much easier to do things that sabotage you - like overindulge on rich foods and drinks.

To combat this, start each day with a reminder that it's important to you to stay on track with your weight goals. Keep reminding yourself each day, several times a day - and especially when you are faced with a temptation. You might ask yourself, "How

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important is it to me to keep my weight under control? Will eating this food help me accomplish that?” More often than not just reminding yourself that your goals are important is enough to put you firmly in control of what goes into your mouth.

Get Relaxed First

Before you go into situations that might be stressful for you, spend 10 minutes getting very relaxed. Sit in a quiet place, close your eyes, and breathe deeply. Listen to soothing music if you like. Focus on serene scenes in your mind, like walking along a beautiful beach, or strolling through a peaceful garden. Just 10 minutes of this is enough to make you feel very calm and centered, so when you get to the mall or your boss's house or any other place that might make you feel pressured, you've already adopted the mind-set that will help you deal with it calmly.

Learn How to Detach

When you do find yourself in a situation where you feel stressed, angry, annoyed, impatient or any other negative emotion, take a mental step back and get your emotions under control. Usually this is as easy as recognizing that someone or something is upsetting you, and making a conscious choice not to let it bother you.

You can use this technique with strangers, coworkers, family members, and more. Simply notice that you're feeling annoyed or upset in some way, and then let go of it. Decide that you aren't going to let it get to you. It might be helpful to use a bit of positive self-talk, like this: "All right, this is really aggravating me right now, but I'm not going to keep focusing on that. What they do doesn't matter to me. I'm letting go of my anger."

It definitely takes practice, but it's a priceless skill that can help

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you avoid “losing it” mentally.

Make Time for Exercise

Just like you may be tempted to skimp on sleep, you may be tempted to skip your workouts so you have more time for baking, shopping, decorating, and social activities. This is a bad idea because exercise is a great help in releasing stress. Remind yourself every day that your daily workouts help keep you feeling stronger, calmer, and more balanced. Then make the time to do them faithfully. Don't see it as something you “have to do” - see it as something you CHOOSE to do as preventative medicine for the mind and body.

Get Organized

One major contributor to stress is disorganization. If you've got a lot of tasks that need to be done, being disorganized can create “logjams” of activities where you suddenly need to do several things in a short amount of time - which only makes you feel more stressed.

You can easily avoid this by thinking and planning ahead. Get yourself a calendar or day planner where you can write in important activities and schedule time for everything else. Do your best to schedule everything! Allot time for wrapping gifts, shopping, cooking and baking, writing out greeting cards, exercise, meditation, sleep - everything you need to do can be organized ahead of time so there are few surprises later.

You Time

Don't forget to make time for yourself in between all of the tasks and chores you're doing. Even if it's just a few minutes to relax

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with a good book, watch a movie with your family after dinner, or take a hot bath before bed, it's important to allow yourself to relax and do nothing for a little while.

Nix the Binges

Have you ever made a decision to eat as much as you wanted at a particular event and resume your diet the next day? How did that make you feel? Maybe you felt good at the time, but the next day you probably felt really guilty, maybe a little sick, and wishing you never did it at all. Binges only add to your stress. Rather than being tempted to do this, remind yourself that you'll only feel badly about it tomorrow, so you're going to be smart about your eating. Decide that you will indulge a little bit, but you can do that without ruining your healthy eating plan.

Don't Expect Perfection

All of the previous tips in this guide might give the impression that no "slipping" is allowed, but that's just not realistic. You know you're going to slip up (unless you've got willpower stronger than titanium). But the slip-ups themselves aren't what you need to be most concerned about. It's your reaction to the slip-ups that matter most.

Many people react with strong negative emotion and proceed to "beat themselves up" for days. That makes them feel so bad that they could be prodded back into eating more, and maybe even giving up on their goals altogether. You are human - go easy on yourself! If you slip and eat something you shouldn't, just do your best to compensate for it later. Drink a few extra glasses of water. Spend more time walking the next day. It's not the end of the world.

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Expect Temptations

Another thing that might add to your stress level is being unprepared for the temptations you will undoubtedly face throughout the holiday season. When you're unprepared, you might be more likely to act without thinking and eat things you didn't want to eat. Avoid this by thinking ahead and strengthening your resolve. Say to yourself, "There will be a lot of food at this dinner party. I'm going to enjoy myself, but I'm going to stick mostly to healthy foods. For any richer foods that I want to try, I will have just a taste." Setting that intention before you get there will help you stick to your plan.

Strengthen Your Willpower

The stronger your willpower is, the less tempted you will be to fold in the face of temptation. Even when you aren't attending parties and dinners, keep reminding yourself that food has no control over you. Say things like this: "I am always conscious of what goes into my mouth. I choose what I eat and don't eat. I can easily turn down food if I want to." The more you say things like that, you will eventually come to believe them and act accordingly.

Be Nice to Yourself

All of the tips in this guide will be much easier to follow if you make an effort to be nice to yourself. Rather than seeing your goals to be healthy and lose weight as a punishment ("I'm fat so I can't enjoy myself"), see them as something good you are doing for yourself ("I feel better when I eat right, and I can still enjoy treats when I want them").

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Keep a Positive Attitude

Speaking of all this “feel good” stuff, developing a positive attitude goes a long way in managing stress. The more optimistic, enthusiastic, patient and kind you can be (toward yourself and others), the less stressed you will feel. If you currently have a negative mind-set, you will definitely want to start practicing building a positive attitude as often as possible. It takes time to stick, but it’s not hard to do.

Focus on the True “Treats” of the Holidays

Last but not least, the true bonus of the holiday season is not the food and drinks; it's spending time with people you care about and taking time to celebrate life and love. Focus on those things and let the joy of the season fill you up, rather than food.

It’s All About Balance

As you may realize by now, staying on track during the holiday season, or any time, is about balance. Balancing your eating and exercise habits, your obligations and responsibilities, social activities like parties and dinners, getting enough rest, and everything else you do. You don’t have to be perfect - you just need to do your best to make the right decisions. Do that and you’ll breeze through the holidays without a glitch.

Happy Holidays!

Suzanne

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