

Strategies to Cope With Holiday Eating

-- By Becky Hand, Licensed & Registered Dietitian

The most wonderful time of the year is back, and that means one thing: notorious holiday parties! Between the office buffet, neighborhood open house, family gatherings, religious festivities, and community get-togethers, sticking to a healthy eating plan becomes, well, difficult to say the least.

The reason? Simple. Tempting, high fat, calorie-laden dishes are the common denominator of almost every holiday celebration. And excuses for overindulgence are as easy to find as holiday cheer.

Check out the following excuses. If any of them sounds familiar, don't worry. We have strategies to help you deal with these excuses, and still enjoy the holiday season.

Excuse #1: The food looks and tastes so good! How can I resist?

It's true—there will be plenty of terrific foods. But will you feel good *after* you eat them? Imagine yourself overindulging. How do you feel afterwards? Was the taste really worth it? Could you have received the same pleasure with a smaller amount?

Excuse #2: It's a special occasion. It only comes once a year.

The holidays only come once a year, but the parties, events, and gifts of food never seem to end! Stop and decide which ones are really worth the splurge. When it is time for the splurge, bank calories from earlier in the day.

Excuse #3: Everyone else is eating. The hostess will be offended.

Just because everyone is eating does not mean that you have to eat everything too. Choosing smaller portions shouldn't offend anyone. Remember, "If you half-it, you can have it." And sometimes it may be necessary to "just say no".

Excuse #4: I should offer desserts to the company in my home.

Keeping your favorite desserts at home usually spells trouble. When treats are in the house, more of the dessert usually ends up in you, rather than your guests. Therefore, keep some low fat, low-calorie alternatives on hand. Make a trip to your local library and flip through the healthy holiday cooking magazines and books for other creative alternatives.

Excuse #5: I'll get back to my healthy eating plan tomorrow.

This thinking is okay, *as long as it is realistic*. Make sure an occasional splurge does NOT become a repeated excuse (or turn into "next week" or "next month").

Putting It All Together...

The best defense against holiday eating disasters is a combination of both *planning and strategy*:

1. Take inventory. Identify all the situations that make it difficult for you to eat healthy during the holiday season. Is it office parties? Food courts at the shopping mall? Family gatherings? Extra baking and cooking at home?

2. Plan a system of attack. For example:

- Bring a low calorie appetizer to the office party.
- Don't go shopping on an empty stomach.
- Use healthier substitutions and make a low-calorie, low-fat dessert for the family gathering.
- Budget calories throughout the day, so you can afford to spend a few more at the party.
- Burn extra calories in a longer-than-usual exercise session. Some research shows that adding just 10 more minutes of *intense* exercise to your usual workout can stave off holiday weight gain.
- Stay focused by getting 7-8 hours of sleep nightly.

3. Remember to reward. Making it through the holidays can be hard work. Establish a reward system to stay motivated along the way. Deposit a pre-determined amount of money (the amount should be based on what you can financially afford) in a jar every week that you are able to follow your healthy eating plan. Then after the holidays—when the sales are big—go out and buy something special just for you!

4. Stay positive. Everyone makes mistakes, so there will be times when even the most disciplined person will slip. Don't worry or stress during these mishaps—it is critical to get back on track. Staying positive is half the battle.

