

## Healthy Eating & Diet

### Top 10 Holiday Diet Tips of All Time

Experts offer their top tips on handling holiday diet temptations.

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WebMD Weight Loss Clinic-Feature

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Holidays bring family and friends together to celebrate traditions and spread good cheer. They also bring lots of opportunities for socializing, eating, and drinking. Even the most disciplined people struggle with temptation during the holiday season.

To navigate the party landmines with your healthy [diet](#) intact, you need a strategy. Experts agree: Having a plan in place will help you handle night after night of eating and drinking.

"Think of your appetite as an expense account, and figure out how much you want to spend on drinks, appetizers, entrees, and dessert," advises Michelle May, MD, author of *Am I Hungry? What to Do When Diets Don't Work*. She suggests giving yourself permission to enjoy your favorite foods -- in sensible portions.

To help you survive the seasonal parties without packing on the pounds, WebMD consulted diet gurus across the country for their best holiday diet tips. Here are their top 10 recommendations:

- 1. Trim back the trimmings.** Go all out and deck the halls with boughs of holly, glitter, and lights, but when it comes to holiday food, accessorize with care. To shave calories, go easy when adding nuts, cheese, cream sauces, gravy, butter, and whipped cream -- additions that don't add much to the meal, but can add plenty to your waistline. Trim calories wherever you can so you leave the party feeling satisfied, but not stuffed, recommends Carolyn O'Neil, MS, RD, author of *The Dish on Eating Healthy and Being Fabulous*.
- 2. Wear snug clothes and keep one hand busy.** When you wear snug-fitting attire, chances are you'll be too busy holding in your stomach to overeat. While you stand around looking posh in your holiday finery, hold a drink in your dominant hand so it won't be so easy to grab food, recommends [obesity](#) expert Cathy Nonas, MS, RD.
- 3. Chew gum.** When you don't want to eat, pop a piece of sugarless gum into your mouth. This works well when you're cooking or when you're trying not to dive into the buffet, says Nonas.
- 4. Be a food snob.** If you don't love it, don't eat it, says American Dietetic Association spokeswoman Melinda Johnson, MS, RD. Scan the buffet for foods you truly treasure and skip the everyday dishes that are available all year long. And don't think it's your responsibility to sample everything on the buffet. Go ahead and indulge in your personal holiday favorites, then find a seat and, slowly and mindfully, savor every mouthful.
- 5. No skipping meals.** Always eat normally on the day of a party. "People who skip meals to save up calories tend to overeat everything in sight once they get there," says Katherine Tallmadge, MA, RD, author of *Diet Simple*. "Eating sensibly throughout the day will take the edge off the appetite and empower a bit of restraint." Start with a nourishing breakfast, have a light lunch, then a small snack or salad shortly before the event.
- 6. Check it out.** First things first. When you arrive at the party, grab a sparkling water with a twist, and wait at least 30 minutes before eating. This will give you time to relax, get comfortable in your surroundings, and survey your food choices on the buffet before diving in, says Tallmadge. A buffet is an invitation to eat all you can, and unless you carefully scrutinize it and make wise choices, you're likely to overeat.
- 7. Add fun and games.** Cynthia Sass, MPH, MA, RD, co-author of *Your Diet Is Driving Me Crazy*, proposes taking the focus off food and getting family and friends more active during holiday parties. Think horseshoes, badminton, sledding, ice skating, or building snowmen. Indoors, try a spirited game of charades, or rent an instructional dance video followed by a dance-off. "The best parties include dancing, so why not make dancing after eating a new holiday tradition for a great form of fun and recreation?" asks David Katz, MD, MPH, author of *The Flavor Point Diet*.
- 8. Alternate alcohol with nonalcoholic beverages.** Alcoholic drinks are loaded with calories -- especially holiday favorites like eggnog. "Cut your alcohol calories in half by alternating water or seltzer between alcoholic beverages," Katz advises.
- 9. Skip the appetizers.** "Eschew the appetizers rather than chewing on them," says Katz. If you need a little nibble before the meal, go for the veggies, fruit, salsa, or a small handful of nuts.

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**10. Limit the variety.** Brian Wansink, PhD, author of *Mindless Eating*, suggests putting only two items on your plate when you go to the food table. Return as many times as you like, but only take two items each time. "Variety stimulates appetite, and if you limit your choices to just a few items and stick with these, it will be easier to control than eating a little bit of 20 different dishes," agrees Katz.

Holiday parties are much more than food and drinks. They are a time to delight in the traditions of the season, and enjoy the company of family and friends. If you keep the focus on the spirit of the season -- and heed the advice of our diet experts -- you'll most likely get through the holidays without gaining a pound.

And if you do splurge, don't beat yourself up, the experts say. Just get right back to normal eating and exercising, and try to do a better job at the next party.

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SOURCES: Michelle May, MD, author, *Am I Hungry? What to Do When Diets Don't Work*. Carolyn O'Neil, MS, RD, author, *The Dish on Healthy and Being Fabulous*. Cathy Nonas, MS, RD, spokeswoman, American Dietetic Association (ADA); director, diabetes and obesity programs, North General Hospital, New York. Melinda Johnson, MS, RD, spokeswoman, ADA. Katherine Tallmadge, MA, RD, spokeswoman, ADA; author, *Diet Simple*. Cynthia Sass, MPH, MA, RD, spokeswoman, ADA; co-author, *Your Diet Is Driving Me Crazy*. David Katz, MD, MPH, associate professor, Yale University School of Public Health; author, *The Flavor Point Diet*. Brian Wansink, PhD, author, *Mindless Eating*, professor and director, Cornell University Food and Brand Lab, New York.

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