

Avoiding Holiday Weight Gain and Guilt

In reality, the average American only puts on one pound during the holiday season; however, this can add up over several years if healthier choices do not occur away from these special occasions. The holidays are meant to be enjoyed and cherished. Eating and socializing is great, but once the new year comes, people continue to feel guilt and the need to lose weight and get in shape. To ensure you have a healthy balance this holiday season, be sure to follow several tricks and healthy lifestyle tips.

1. Eat a regular breakfast

A regular breakfast kick starts the metabolism and gives us energy for the day. It also curbs late night hunger. Research indicates that those who eat a healthy breakfast tend to weigh less and have better control of cholesterol levels (1). Be sure to have a breakfast consisting of a high-fiber item, lean protein options, and a heart-healthy fat. Bonus points if you can add veggies!

Healthy Breakfast Examples:

- 2-3 egg omelet with mixed veggies and salsa, 1-2 slices wheat toast, 1-2 TBSP avocado
- Yogurt parfait: $\frac{3}{4}$ cup low-sugar Greek yogurt with 1 cup berries, 1 TBSP dark chocolate, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup walnuts
- Protein smoothie with 1 scoop protein powder, 2 TBSP low-sugar yogurt (optional), 1.5 cups milk/milk alternative, 1 TBs peanut or nut butter, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup frozen fruit, 1.2 cup frozen spinach
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cottage cheese with with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup canned pineapple (made with 100% juice) and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup walnuts
- Ensure Max premade protein drink with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup almonds and an apple or banana
- Trail mix: $\frac{1}{4}$ cup nuts, 1 TBSP dark chocolate, 1 cup plain Cheerios
 - **Add a glass of milk or string cheese on the side for more protein.
- Kodiak Cakes Double Chocolate Overnight Oats (see recipe below)
 - <https://kodiakcakes.com/blogs/recipes/double-chocolate-overnight-oats>

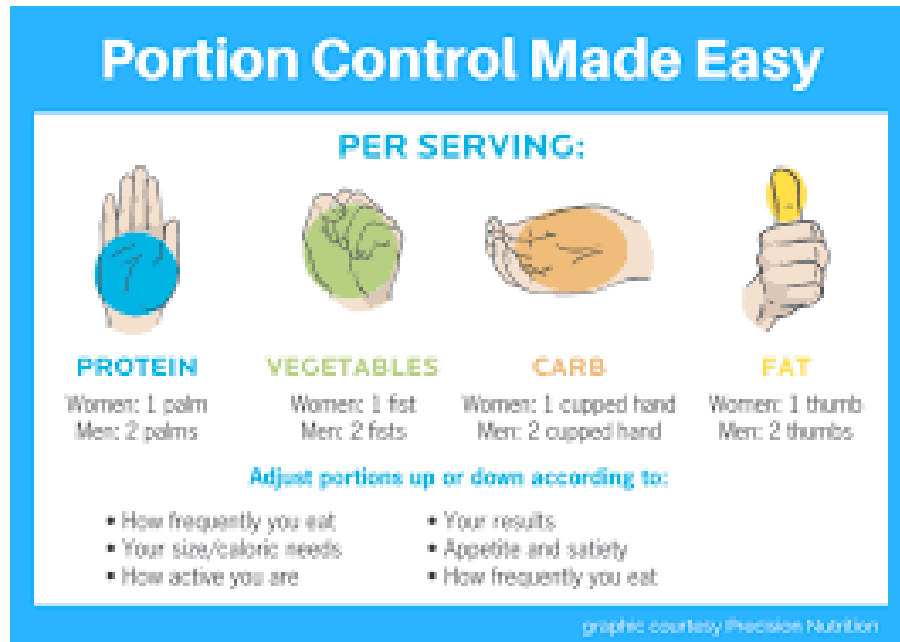
2. Avoid skipping meals altogether.

Eat three high protein, high-fiber meals daily. Do not skip meals to “make room” or skip a meal solely to eat dessert. Our bodies need nutrients and we must regulate our blood sugars by eating a few times a day. By “pacing” our meal consumption throughout the day, we are better able to practice portion control (see more about this below).

3. Enjoy the day and be mindful!

Before getting ready for a gathering, try to get some exercise by going for a walk. Involve others by participating in a Turkey Trot. You can also walk with family members or friends at the event or have a family football game.

Eat all your favorite foods and do not add foods to your plate you don't care for. It may be a gesture of politeness, but it is not being kind to your belly! Avoid portion distortion and be aware of how much you are consuming.



<https://www.precisionnutrition.com/create-the-perfect-meal-infographic>

4. Focus on protein and non-starchy vegetables!

Eat these items first on your plate. Turkey, ham, and baked chicken are great sources of protein and will help fill you up before you get to the sugary/starchy stuff. Vegetables are low-calorie and full of nutrients and fiber, which also help with fullness. Making your own healthy side dish or bringing a veggie tray is a great way to ensure there are healthy options available if you are not the one hosting the event. See below for a link for healthy side dish ideas.

5. Go light on the condiments.

Try using a smaller serving spoon for gravy and limit butter to fingertip size servings. Avoid adding table salt to foods to keep from taking in too much sodium. A diet high in sodium may lead to high blood pressure (2). Excess salt intake also leads to water retention that can result in temporary weight gain (3).

6. Chew food slowly and thoroughly.

It should take about 20 minutes or more to complete a meal. Research has shown that chewing food more can lead to lower body weight. Satiety increases because you are better able to recognize and enjoy more flavors (4, 5). Sipping water between every couple bites of food is also helpful. If you eat slowly, you are more likely to recognize when you are feeling satisfied, or when you are about 80% full, and can stop eating (6).

7. Share desserts and limit the amount of leftovers you take home.

Pick small samples of 1-2 of your favorite desserts and share them. If you take a box to go, make sure this is something that is not going to tempt you for the next month or be eaten completely in one sitting.

8. Wait at least 10 minutes before going back for seconds.

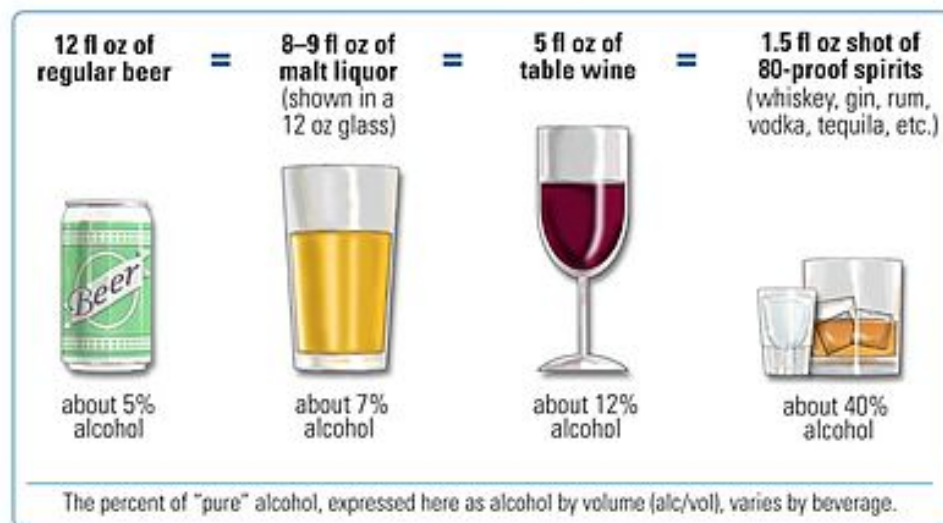
It takes our brains and stomach about 20 minutes to recognize fullness (7). Rather than getting right up for seconds, sip some water, get up and go to the bathroom, and stand around to mingle. This is a great way to avoid gastric reflux. If you have been standing and mingling for a while and still feel hungry, then getting seconds is appropriate.

9. Drink mostly water with meals.

Water is calorie-free! Adding sugary beverages on top of desserts and casseroles adds a lot of carbs and calories, and can send blood sugars through the roof! Added sugars in particular have been linked with development of weight gain, diabetes, and obesity in adults and children. The American Heart Association recommends an added sugar limit of no more than 100 calories per day (about 6 teaspoons or 24 grams) for most adult women and no more than 150 calories per day (about 9 teaspoons or 36 grams of sugar) for most men. Men tend to burn more calories than women; thus, a higher sugar amount can be consumed (8).

Alcohol also contains calories (and sugar depending on what you drink); additionally, consumption can lower inhibitions and lead to poor judgment. This can translate to overdoing it with food choices and portion sizes. It is okay to drink alcohol moderately; this is defined as one drink daily for women and two drinks daily for men (no, you cannot save all 7-14 of your drinks for one day/the weekend). Our bodies only have so much of the enzyme that metabolizes

alcohol. Men tend to have a higher body mass, more body water, and more of this enzyme that allows them to metabolize a bit more. It is also important to avoid binge drinking. According to the CDC, this is defined as 5 or more drinks on an occasion for men or 4 or more drinks on an occasion for women (9). Check out more about sugar-sweetened beverages and alcohol below.



Healthier mocktails to try:

<https://www.cookforyourlife.org/blog/healthier-holiday-mocktails/>

10. Don't turn the holidays into half a year of high-calorie. High-sugar choices.

Take home mostly protein and vegetables as leftovers. You can also freeze leftovers to avoid eating too much on the days following the event. See below for recipes for leftover utilization.

After the new year comes the Super Bowl, then Valentine's Day, then St. Patrick's Day, then Easter. Every major event tends to involve food, so eating healthier on days without special occasions is essential. Monitoring the amount you eat to feel festive is also important. Are you eating a few pieces of chocolate on Valentine's Day, or are you snacking on candy all of February and moving straight to the Easter candy? Enjoying these every once in a while is fine, and a small sweet treat can be added to a healthy diet. Most candies now have 200-calorie or less small snack versions to help with portion control.

Storage Tips: <https://thekitchenchalkboard.com/thanksgiving-leftovers-storage-guide/>

Leftover Recipe Ideas:

<https://www.eatingwell.com/article/32709/easy-ways-to-turn-thanksgiving-leftovers-into-healthy-meals/>

The holidays are a great time! Sure, there is some stress, but you should be enjoying yourself and not feeling guilty later. All in all, it is the days in between and around the holiday season that count the most. However, there are tips to make healthier choices at these events as well. Whenever possible, be sure to incorporate plenty of protein, fiber, and heart-healthy fats in your meals. Limit sugary beverages and alcohol consumption. Be sure to get out and get active for at least 30 minutes a day. Happy Holidays, and live healthy everyday!

Resources

1. https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/johns-hopkins-childrens-center/what-we-treat/specialties/nephrology/programs-centers/obesity-hypertension-clinic/_documents/eating-right-wake-up-benefits-breakfast2.pdf
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/sodium.htm#:~:text=The%20body%20needs%20a%20small,for%20heart%20disease%20and%20stroke.&text=Most%20of%20the%20sodium%20we%20consume%20is%20in%20the%20form%20of%20salt.>
3. <https://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/salthealth/salt-and-water-retention/>
4. <https://www.webmd.com/diet/obesity/features/slow-down-you-eat-too-fast>
5. <https://www.webmd.com/diet/obesity/features/crunch-chew-your-way-to-healthier-eating>
6. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/mindful-eating/>
7. <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/sshw/message/message.php?p=Health&m=219#:~:text=Eat%20a%20moderate%20first%20serving,easy%2Dto%2Dsee%20portions.>
8. [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/added-sugar-in-the-diet/#:~:text=The%20AHA%20suggests%20a%20stricter,of%20sugar\)%20for%20most%20men.](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/added-sugar-in-the-diet/#:~:text=The%20AHA%20suggests%20a%20stricter,of%20sugar)%20for%20most%20men.)
9. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm#:~:text=What%20does%20moderate%20drinking%20mean,women%2C%20when%20alcohol%20is%20consumed.>

About the Author

Bri King is a registered dietitian for the Warren County Health District. She works specifically in weight management, prenatal, and pediatric nutrition. Bri attended Miami University of Ohio for her undergraduate and master's studies in nutrition and exercise science. She will be going back part time to teach a lifespan nutrition class to undergraduates in the fall. Bri's favorite hobbies include cooking and weightlifting. She also enjoys dancing, hanging out with friends, and laying by the poolside in the summer. She married her husband, Jeron last September and the two just bought their first home in Springboro, Ohio. Bri looks forward to expanding nutrition and cooking knowledge throughout the county to make it more accessible to those in need.

