



Powered by Clickability

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Eat-smart strategies for party season

By Amelia R. Farquhar
CookingLight.com

The conventional wisdom about the holidays is that weight gain is unavoidable. But don't let it scare you away from enjoying your favorite foods at this time of year. Here are three eat-smart strategies to get you through the season.

Enjoy holiday foods with moderation

Many common holiday foods -- sweet potatoes, dried fruit, and turkey, to name a few -- are nutritious options when enjoyed *in moderation*. Sneak in a little extra physical activity every day to burn off additional calories and benefit from the stress-reducing effects of exercise.

Also remember, if you want to avoid overindulging with a food you really love, this is not the only time of year you can eat it. "Ask for a recipe from the cook so you can make it at home, and simply opt to prepare it after the holidays," says Milton Stokes, R.D., a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

The average weight gain during the six-week span from Thanksgiving to New Year's is just under one pound, according to a yearlong study of nearly 200 people published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Even though enjoying delicious holiday dishes might not increase your waistline by as much as you'd expect, calorie consciousness is still important.

"The weight increase isn't dramatic, but the research did reveal something significant -- study participants did not reverse their gains during the following months," says Susan Z. Yanovski, M.D., study coauthor and director of the Obesity and Eating Disorders Program at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. This has led obesity experts to speculate that the small weight gain from the holidays may accumulate from year to year, contributing to the more substantial gains many people experience as they age.

Keep your appetite in check.

One way to avoid a post-meal energy drain is to approach a big dinner with an appetite that's in check. Avoid eating smaller-than-normal portions for breakfast and lunch, which may leave you feeling ravenous at dinner and prompt you to eat more than normal, Stokes says.

The reason a nap is so appealing after any big meal is the large amount of energy required to digest it, Stokes says. During the process, blood is diverted away from the nervous system and to the digestive system -- where it's needed to help break down food and absorb nutrients. "It's no wonder people are left feeling less energetic, fatigued, and even foggy-headed," Stokes says. Your body signals you to rest because it has a lot of work to do.

Maintain your equilibrium during social situations.

Research indicates that it's not the parties that prompt us to eat, but being around friends and family that may lead to diet missteps. In a study conducted at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, researchers found that dining in a group causes the average person to eat 44 percent more calories than he or she normally would eating alone. "When you're socializing, it's natural to lose track of what and how much you're eating," says Barbara Rolls, Ph.D., professor of nutritional sciences at Pennsylvania State University. "Since the number of distractions will most likely be greater, a holiday party can increase the tendency to overeat even more than just going out to dinner with friends."

Being mindful will help you keep a mental checklist of how much you're consuming. Since you don't want to offend by skipping your host's offerings, try taking a smaller serving. Make a conscious effort to balance your plate with plenty of fruits and veggies, and a healthy portion -- about three to four ounces -- of protein, Rolls says. Also, take a second to look at every bite before you eat it. This psychological connection will help you keep your portions under control.

Amelia R. Farquhar writes about health, fitness, and nutrition from her home in Ossining, New York.

[Try a FREE TRIAL issue of Cooking Light - CLICK HERE!](#)

Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/HEALTH/diet.fitness/12/11/CL.holiday.eating/index.html>

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.