**How to Create Your Holiday Plate to Avoid the Weight**

The holiday season is in full swing now that Thanksgiving has passed! Some of us have narrowly dodged the start of the holiday weight gain, while others have already taken a hit. For both groups we know the holiday season is far from over as we now enter December. From work parties to the family get together, and everything in between, there is always one constant; food! Between travel, the cold weather, and the switch in daylight savings, gyms are slowly becoming ghost towns.

So what do we do? Do we accept our fate until January 1st where we often set unrealistic goals to achieve and punish ourselves for the actions of the last few months because we are unhappy with what we did? No way! Today I’m here to save you from yourself by explaining some nutrition basics and help you load that holiday plate the right way to avoid the weight!

**Understanding Weight Gain**

While the majority of us fear weight gain in general, most of us simply do not understand food beyond the most basic level of “it tastes good” or “this food is bad for me” and “this food is good for me”. Understanding the basics of nutrition will allow for you to remove the labels of “good” and “bad” from your vocabulary and change your mindset to “I can make this work”.

So what do I mean by this? The body when digesting food does not recognize a piece of cake as a piece of cake, but instead recognizes what the cake and its ingredients are made of; fats, proteins, and carbohydrates. These are called macronutrients, macro meaning you need them in large quantities. Not cake, but the fats, proteins, and carbohydrates haha! Each macronutrient yields a specific amount of energy; known commonly as a calorie. For the sake of keeping this article universally easy to understand, just know that fat contains more calories per gram than both carbohydrates and protein.

* Fat: 1 gram equals 9 calories
* Protein and Carbohydrates: 1 gram equals 4 calories

Now that we have the first step of understanding calories, let’s talk about what specifically causes weight gain. In terms of strictly weight loss and weight gain, the amount of calories you consume vs. the amount of calories you burn throughout your day will control the swing of the scale. Meaning, if you were to eat 3000 calories in a day, but only burnt 2000 calories, then you would be on your way to gain weight. Simple enough right? Maybe not what you wanted to hear, but it’s pretty straight forward!

It’s important to also understand that your body burns hundreds, if not thousands of calories just keeping you alive daily, so do not think you have to stay on the treadmill or lift weights until you see 1000+ calories burnt to avoid weight gain! In fact, by utilizing the tips in this article, you can save yourself the heartache of gaining all those unneeded pounds without having to spend all of December in the gym!

**The Pre Plate Strategy:**

Learn how to read nutrition labels! You don’t need to understand everything, but simply by turning that box, can, or package around and scanning the nutrition label for the macronutrients will create awareness of what you are about to put in your body. The nutrition label will also inform you of the serving size, which may shock you, and will help you begin to identify foods that are high and low in specific macronutrients. For example, a piece of chicken is almost completely all protein, while oil is completely fats. Cereal on the other hand is nearly almost all carbohydrates. Okay, okay, some of you are saying “duh Justin I learned that in elementary school!” While this might be true, this is an elementary principle in succeeding! I’ll explain here in a second!

One secret to my success with the holiday season is to aim for high protein foods throughout your day before heading to your event! Protein is a great macronutrient to keep you full and will prepare you for the dishes ahead! In fact, I highly recommend consuming a high protein snack immediately before heading to your party to keep you satisfied and less tempted to over indulge in “finger-foods”. This can be a protein shake or bar, Greek yogurt, or even a deli rollup.

**Let’s talk about working out!**

“Justin you just promised me that I would not have to work out!” Well, no, I said you would not have to work out for hours on end, but fitting even a short work out in before a big get together can be absolutely crucial to having your body store all those delicious calories properly!

Again, we are going to keep things simple in the article, so just understand that when your body undergoes physical activity it uses the stored calories as energy as well as primes it to efficiently store the oncoming of future calories!

**So how should I work out?**

I recommend keeping your pre-holiday event workouts high repetition with short resting periods, and if performed, your pre-holiday event cardio high intensity with intervals of low intensity. Both approaches prior to your holiday fun will actually make the body a sponge to store those calories into the muscle!

**The Plating Strategy:**

The time has come! You are mingling with friends and family having a great time, but secretly eyeing all the appetizers wondering what is for dinner—or maybe that’s just me!

It is not unheard of that your options will all be heavy on the carbohydrate and fat side, so while you might not have labels to read or not know every ingredient in a dish, you can safely assume most will be low in protein, with the exception of maybe the main dish if it has meat. You knew this though because you have now become a proficient nutrition label reader which has helped you identify foods and categorize them not as good and bad, but as high in specific macronutrients.

 The key to plating is to simply view your plate as a puzzle! Create a balance of each macronutrient with an emphasis on loading up on the protein and simple ingredient food choices first. Protein and fats will hold you over longer than carbohydrates will, but again remember that high fat food choices can quickly add up in calories. Start small when plating your side dishes and come back later if you feel you need more. More times than not you will feel satisfied with less than you think!

While there might be more fun options to drink at the party, do not neglect your water intake as it can drastically help you fill up before over-consuming on food! When drinking hard alcohol stick to diet, low calorie, and zero calorie mixers to avoid excess calories. When drinking beer stick to light options, and when drinking wine limit yourself to 1-2 glasses.

When you sit down at the table to eat, eat slowly and engage in good conversation with family and friends! It takes time for your stomach to send signals to your brain to tell you that you are full so if you are in the corner with your head into your plate, there is a good chance you will overdo it!

Ultimately it will be your mindset and desire to stay on top of your goals that will control how your holiday season affects your weight. The tips in this article can be extremely helpful in allowing you to fully enjoy the joys of the season, while starting off the New Year ahead! Creating a healthy relationship with food while recognizing how to eat to reach your goals is a fundamental concept that will lead to long term success beyond the holiday season.

Stay active, eat responsibly, and have a great finish to your year!