

 BETTER SELF NUTRITION CONSULTING

HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS WITHOUT
SABOTAGING YOUR GOALS



For some, navigating the holiday season can bring about feelings of anxiety and dread.

It can be especially difficult for those who are trying to stay healthy and in shape. It is daunting for those who have spent the year really focusing on establishing healthy eating habits, fat loss goals, and maintaining an active lifestyle.

We at **Better Self** help our clients navigate the holiday season with tools and tactics that can give people the ability to enjoy the holiday season without sabotaging their progress.

The holidays don't have to mean weight gain or destructive behaviors. It's not inevitable.

Here are some simple and helpful tips and tricks that can give anyone the tools to survive the holiday season with ease and enjoyment.



1 REMEMBER TO ENJOY YOURSELF



The first thing to remember is that the holiday season is an opportunity for you to reconnect with your closest friends and family. You should be able to enjoy yourself. You've worked hard all year. It's time to take a break to reflect and relax.

The holiday season is not a time to become a hermit and avoid a holiday get-together just because there will be treats and sugar-laden items there.

There's no need to bring tupperware filled with grilled chicken and broccoli to Grandma's house, either.

An overall healthy diet won't be derailed by three meals or even three days. Try to look at the bigger picture. Context matters when it comes to healthy eating. You don't need to be perfect everyday to continue moving in the right direction towards your goals.

Enjoy the holiday meals. Have some treats. Savor your aunt's pumpkin pie. You can get back on track the following day.

Focus on the small wins day-to-day when you are being more intentional with your eating, and recognize that one or two days won't completely derail you.

2 YOU CAN STILL MAKE HEALTHY & SMART CHOICES



Enjoy yourself! Absolutely. Have a great time with your friends and family.

AND...recognize that you can still make healthy choices. You can still be strategic with your food choices. You don't need to be overly restrictive, but you can still apply a measure of restraint. You don't have to eat to the point where you're feeling bloated and sick.

Focus on staying hydrated. Prioritize getting enough protein on your plate. Choose as many vegetables as you can, you'll benefit from getting tons of micronutrients as well as feel fuller.

Then have a piece of pie. Savor the moment of it. You don't have to eat the entire pie to enjoy it. If you don't love the marshmallow on top of your mom's yam casserole, don't eat it. Don't worry about finishing every morsel of food on your plate.

Be mindful and reasonable with your food consumption, even with a plethora of highly caloric food in your proximity.

3 MAKE PROTEIN THE STAR



When preparing your Thanksgiving or Christmas plate, focus on making the protein option the star of the show.

Holidays tend to be full of foods high in carbs/fat and low in protein.

All the side dishes can compliment and accompany the protein, but protein should still get seniority on your plate.

Aim to pick leaner sources of protein, or at the very least, prioritize those protein sources.

If your options are turkey and prime rib, you might opt to have more lean turkey and a tiny slice of prime rib. Turkey is going to be the leaner choice thus it gets a bigger space.

Avoid items that are excessively processed, too. Resolve to choose not only protein, but whole foods like fruits, veggies, nuts, and dishes that are made from scratch. Unless Aunt Kathy's turkey looks like it's from National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, picking what your mom made is a good bet over the store bought.

4 REASONABLE PORTIONS

We have a tendency to overestimate how much food will fill us up. Be reasonable with your portions. You can always go back if you really want more food. There isn't a shortage.

Some of us have a habit of loading up our plates with more mashed potatoes and dressing than any one person could eat in one sitting. Avoid having a scarcity mindset. There's plenty of food.

No need to hoard it on your plate.

If you need an easy guide, stick to the hand method. On your first round of food, for every carb source, get enough that could fit in the palm of your hand and no more.

Those who load their plate with larger portions tend to eat more food. Smaller portions ensure we don't over-consume.

Another hack that can be helpful is to use smaller plates. When we choose smaller plates, we tend to pick smaller portions, and this allows us the opportunity to not over-consume.



5 AVOID EXCESSIVE SNACKING



Whether it be in the days leading up to holiday meals or appetizers just before the meals themselves, try to avoid snacking more than you usually might.

Highly caloric snacks like cookies, pies, and other treats tend to be plentiful during the holidays. You may find yourself running into them at home and at work.

It's easy to snack more when treats are readily available. Be mindful of your snacking habits during these times.

It might be a good idea to keep these types of snacks and treats out of sight altogether, except for holiday parties.

If you're going to snack because you're legitimately and physiologically hungry, be mindful to pick real foods like fruits, veggies, nuts and other healthy snacks without added sugars and fats.

6 MINDFULLY EAT



We're all in such a rush during the holiday season, whether it's with our loved ones, or while we're preparing dishes for holiday parties.

It's easier to mindlessly consume food. This can lead to over consumption.

Eat mindfully and intentionally. Minimize screens and distractions while eating. Try to stay in the present moment when enjoying time with your closest people.

Chew slowly and savor the food items. In doing so, you'll give your body's fullness hormones to kick in and let you know when you're feeling satiated.

Eating too quickly can't allow for fullness hormones to kick in when you'll want them to. This is why it's easier to consume more calories when you're really hungry. You eat too fast which leads to a delay in satiating hormones which causes higher calorie consumption.

7 GET ENOUGH SLEEP



Getting a regular amount of sleep can pay dividends throughout the year, but it might be especially important during the holidays.

When we're wrapping up the year, it's possible to lose sleep in the process.

Not getting an adequate amount of sleep can lead to mindless snacking and unhealthy fat gain over time. The loss of sleep can activate hormones that actually make you hungrier throughout the day. It throws off your sleep cycle, or circadian rhythm, and that can spill over into your mindset, your energy levels, and your overall health.

8 TRY NOT TO STRESS



The holidays can be stressful. There may be demands on your time and energy that might otherwise not be there.

When we're stressed our cortisol levels are higher. People with elevated levels of cortisol tend to consume more food which can lead to weight gain. To add insult to injury, when our cortisol levels are higher than normal, we actually crave junk food more! We fill the need to control our environment with controlling our food intake, sometimes overdoing on the junk without thinking.

We are also at risk of overcompensating by being overly restrictive. Denying yourself and trying to white-knuckle your way through the holidays isn't helpful or healthy, either. You will be more likely to have an energy crash and then overdo on whatever you were craving to start.

It's important to try and mitigate stress during the holidays. You may have a lot of responsibilities for family parties and work get togethers, but try to have fun with it. Breathe. Appreciate the present moment and take one thing at a time.

When you're surrounded by treats over the holiday season, it's best not to be unnecessarily stressed out. Soak up the good of the season. Find those moments!

9 CUT BACK ON SAMPLING DISHES



Many of us enjoy cooking for our loved ones on holidays and this involved taste-testing a lot of what we're cooking.

Avoid this if you can. Tiny bites and tests can add up to a considerable amount of extra calories. Testing your food may be important, but a tiny bite is probably all you need.

Also, to ensure you don't "test" your food too much, make sure you're not preparing dishes when you're really hungry or stressed out. It's much easier to over-do tasting your dishes with a large appetite.

10 BE INTENTIONAL WITH WHAT YOU BRING



Be intentional with what you bring to the party.

Bring a fruit or veggie tray and snack on it before the big meal if you need to. You might even inspire some of friends or family to do the same.

You can also modify your recipes to include healthier items, or you reduce the amount of sugar, butter, oil, or any other processed carb or fat.

A few other tips for modifying recipes:

Baking

- Replace butter with applesauce, mashed banana, or pumpkin puree.
- Instead of sugar, use a lower-calorie substitute such as stevia, erythritol, or xylitol.
- Add dried fruit instead of chocolate chips or candies.

Cooking

- Flavor dishes with herbs and spices instead of butter.
- Use cooking methods like baking, steaming, or grilling instead of frying.
- Substitute low-fat or skim milk for heavy cream.
- Replace cream cheese, sour cream, and mayo with Greek yogurt.

Beverages

- Flavor your treats with extracts like vanilla, almond, and peppermint instead of butter and sugar.
- Use club soda or sparkling water in place of sweetened beverages.
- Flavor drinks with freshly squeezed lemon or lime rather than sugar.
- Cinnamon can also add flavor to holiday-themed beverages.
- In dairy-based drinks, use low-fat or skim milk in place of heavy cream.

Source: Healthline

Ways to make your dishes healthier

Do you want to cook healthier versions of your favourite recipes without losing the taste? Never fear, here are a few tips that will help you adapt your favourite recipes to reduce fat, sugar, salt, calories and increase fibre without changing your normal diet radically.

Cut down on fats

If frying, use a good non-stick pan and dry fry (e.g. in the case of mince). Leaving out the oil could cut 45 calories per teaspoon in your meal. If your food is drying out, don't add more oil, add a little water. Use fats and oils that are high in good fats (poly- and mono-unsaturated fats), e.g. olive oil and try using less than the recipe suggests.

Cut down on salt

Most recipes indicate that you need to add salt. Replace salt with alternative seasonings such as pepper, herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar or mustard. Allow people to season their own food after tasting it - they are likely to add less. You could be eating more salt than you think, use our salt calculator to find out how much salt really is in your food.

Cut down on sugar

Experiment by using less sugar when you bake - most cakes will work even if the quantity of sugar in the recipe is halved. Items such as fruit cakes, fruit scones and tea breads can be made without adding sugar as the dried fruit will provide sweetness.

Increase fiber

Use brown alternatives of rice, pasta and bread to increase the fibre content of recipes which will help you feel fuller for longer. Instead of using all plain white flour in recipes, use a mix of wholemeal and plain flour when baking, e.g. when making apple crumble – you can also add porridge oats to make the top crunchy and add more fibre! Top dishes usually requiring pastry, such as chicken pie, with mashed potato instead.

Soups and stews

Allow your broth, stew or soup to cool and skim off the fat that gathers on top of the liquid. Replacing some of the traditional fatty meats in stews with pulses like peas, beans and lentils can save calories and fat as well as adding fibre.

Sauces and dips

Replace cream, whole milk and sour cream with semi-skimmed and skimmed milk, or low fat yoghurt. Low fat yoghurt and fromage frais can be used on hot or cold puddings and in dips instead of cream, double cream or Greek yoghurt. Fromage frais is fresh, skimmed cow's milk cheese but is more like natural yoghurt. It is not suitable for use in cooking.

Cheese

Use strongly flavoured cheeses like mature cheddar or blue cheese in savoury dishes – you can use less and still get all the flavour. If you don't like the strong taste of such cheeses simply use low fat alternatives of your favourites. Grate cheese instead of slicing as it will spread across a dish more easily and you can use less. Replace cream cheese with low fat cream cheese.

Mayonnaise

Replace mayonnaise in salads with natural yoghurt or low fat fromage frais. Better still, try using vinaigrette dressings and serving them on the side. When making sandwiches, choose mayonnaise or butter, not both.

Vegetables

Flavour cooked vegetables with herbs instead of butter or oil. Replace some meat in dishes such as shepherd's pie, casseroles and lasagna, with vegetables and pulses (peas, beans and lentils). It is a great way to disguise vegetables for those fussy eaters.

Meat

Trim the fat from meat and remove the skin from poultry before cooking. Then bake, grill, microwave, roast or poach instead of frying it. When roasting, place the meat on a grill rack – this allows the fat to drip away. If you are cooking minced meat, brown it and drain away the fat before adding other ingredients.

11 BRING A HEALTHY PARTNER- IN-CRIME



It's easier to be intentional with your eating on holidays when you have a partner-in-crime to do it with. Solidarity!

It could be a spouse, relative, or a friend. Whoever will hold you accountable and help you if you are on the struggle bus. Have someone on your side that can accompany you to family functions or work parties.

Someone with similar goals can help to keep you motivated in the presence of tempting treats.

12 PLAN



Planning ahead can take the stress out of holiday eating. Resolve to eat certain healthier items more often than not.

Reach out to the person throwing the party. Ask what food will be available and fill the healthy food gaps that are present.

Planning can go a long way in the interest of being intentional with our food consumption. Especially over the holidays.

13 MAKE A COMMITMENT



It can be easy to say “screw it” during the holidays. Some of us think gaining weight, feeling sickly full, and mindless overindulgence is inevitable during this time. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Resolve to keep commitments to yourself. You might be thinking, “I’ll start eating healthy January 1st.” Avoid this type of thinking. It’s only prolonging more of what you don’t want. Maintaining unhealthy habits will keep you from getting to where you want to be.

Be aware of the fact that you may have a few days where you consume more calories than normal, and that’s okay. No reason to throw out all of your hard work on the non-holiday party days.

Don’t abandon your goals. Set realistic limits and exercise a small portion of restraint. It’s okay to politely decline certain food items. Enjoy what you really enjoy and don’t feel guilty about it. This isn’t the normal routine, it’s the exception. You don’t have to participate in certain unhealthy habitual behaviors just because Uncle Frank is insisting you should. You don’t owe him anything. You only owe it to yourself. You owe it to yourself to be present and intentional!

When you resume normal behavior, you can rest easy knowing you were intentional and deliberate about holiday eating. You didn’t lose momentum. You didn’t stall yourself. You aren’t starting from scratch.

Each day is new.

14 STAY ACTIVE



Continue exercising and working out as you normally would during the holiday season. Just because it's December doesn't mean you should take a month off from physical activity.

Maintain your normal exercise regimen, and if you're not currently participating in one, this time might be a great time to start.

You'll get a head start on the new year resolution crowd and you'll probably be working out in a relatively empty gym!

You'll also get a boost in energy from extra carbohydrates. This can help serve as added fuel during your workouts.

IN CONCLUSION...

*Don't fret.
Be merry.
Give thanks.*

It's the holidays and they're meant to be enjoyed. Don't be too hard on yourself. Recognize that it's only a limited time of the year. Take it day by day. Enjoy the time with your loved ones and remember to make some memories. Stay present and breathe through it with calm and ease.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!





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**ONLINE NUTRITION COACHING-
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