



**Your
Ultimate
Guide!**

*Spiritual Eating Over the Holidays
to Avoid Weight Gain*

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As a dietitian now for the past 10+ years, I've seen so many clients doing pretty well all year long, only to feel stressed right before the holidays, and some of them - gaining a few pounds by the time it's all over. I always explain to my clients that the holidays are something to prepare for. Usually I see that those who plan it out fare much better.

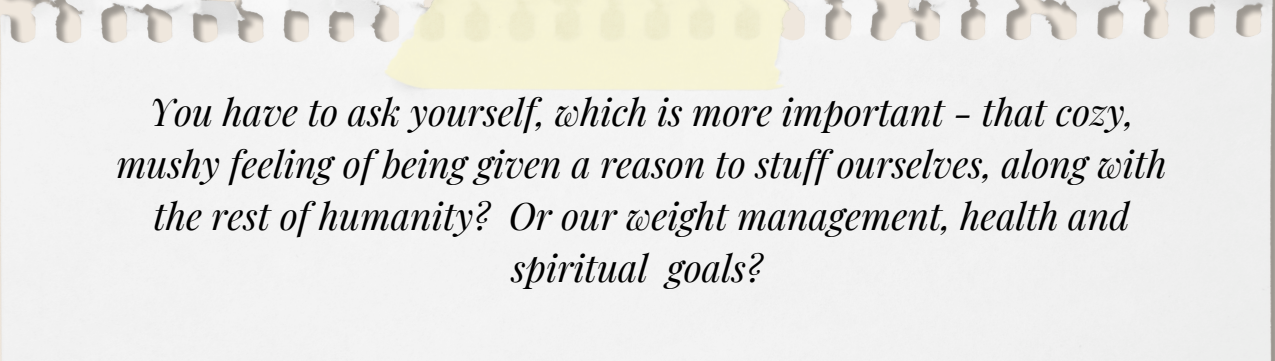
Going into Thanksgiving, Christmas or any other holiday, when you're trying to lose weight, is theoretically, and maybe even physically, if you think about it, not much different than going into a war without a weapon or a plan. So congratulate yourself for stopping by to check out some of my best tips ever for avoiding holiday weight gain! I plan to update this, but for now, here is the best I have for you!

Getting to the core of why we overeat at the holidays

Being totally honest with yourself, you know you can get most of the foods of Thanksgiving just about anytime. So what makes it so great about this time of the year? It's that you're with other people enjoying those foods, or even if you're not around other people, just knowing that other people are enjoying the same kinds of foods creates a sort of emotional sense of camaraderie in the mind that we crave.

Thanksgiving, because of all the reasons stated above ("everyone else is doing it!") gives many of us an excuse to give up on all the good work we've done all year to not be greedy, and to stay within our healthy eating plan.

Knowing this information - How can you prevent it from making you eat things in the amounts that you shouldn't?



You have to ask yourself, which is more important - that cozy, mushy feeling of being given a reason to stuff ourselves, along with the rest of humanity? Or our weight management, health and spiritual goals?

Seriously- This is an important question to contemplate. If you can see through this dilemma and it has empowered you to eat less over the next holiday meal, to prevent yourself from cheating yourself about eating extra food, than you normally would anyway, over any other normal day, then you may not need to read any further.

But I hope you will read on anyway because the more information you have at your disposal and know-how you have, the better!

It's all mostly psychological.

Most weight management starts and ends in the brain. If you make it there, in the mind, to **get good at mindful and spiritual eating and avoid emotional eating**, then you can make it anywhere in weight management. Of course, knowledge about healthy weight management and nutrition is also super important, and all the psychological components surrounding all these things.

One of the first things you have to do is **handle stress**. It doesn't matter if you read this article or other great articles - If you don't manage your stress levels, all those great tips and information will fly out the window when the rubber meets the road. **Success in almost anything involves planning**. So go ahead and predict all the things that could go wrong, and be very familiar with all your trigger points that usually make you upset. Perhaps it's a certain relative who always shows up that you have unresolved issues with, or a certain topic (or topics) that is (are) best to avoid at the dinner table. What kind of good stories and jokes can you pre-plan to bring ahead for when the need to urgently turn the topic elsewhere arrives?

Just as well, leave a little room for the total wildcards that you didn't expect and plan on how you would react in all of these cases. Take a deep breath and know this is life and it's going to happen.

If you're a Believer, **giving the stress to God** to take care of it for you is really powerful. Calming down and not reacting until you know the best way to react, is a great way to take a stressful event and make it end less stressfully. A lot of times when people are stressed, the immediate thought is, "*I need to, and deserve to, eat a ton of food right now!*" But if you were a believer in Christ, you know that He is the only one who is really entitled to receive tons of good things. Of course through God's grace we get these things too, but Jesus is really the only one to have this kind of attitude.



There usually is a lot of *"oh come on you can have some of this! Oh please try what I made!"* But just keep in mind a mantra you can think to yourself as you look at them,... *"Your desire to be complimented as a great Holiday Chef does not have to override my intense desire for my long-time efforts to manage my health and weight."*

I wouldn't say this to the chef's face unless they are really being super pushy oh, but just practicing this and other kinder comebacks ahead of time, will help you greatly to prepare for what is bound to happen.

Variety over quantity

Keep in mind the mantra- Great variety can be much more beneficial than large portions. This technique gives you a lot more to talk about as well! In one holiday you can get in quite a few types of foods, even up to 10-15 different tastes in one meal, as long as each portion is really small, think around a teaspoon even with some! Then after trying everything, you can always go back for the one or two of your favorite items and have an actual serving size. Think of it like a game or contest! The best tasting food wins!

If you're a person who likes a lot of variety, that could work for you. Start by looking over all the foods and deciding which ones you really want to have versus which ones you could pass on. No matter what the case, if it is a buffet-style, just get a tiny, eensy bit of each thing, like I said - a half to whole teaspoon of each.. eat them as mindfully as slowly as possible with tons of people talking at you .

Spiritual eating - Something to embrace year-round

As soon as you have tasted something and know that you don't want it, STOP eating it right away! if you don't, these are totally unnecessary calories. One of the things I teach is **mindfulness**. There's no need to do something that you don't even like.

In addition, be very mindful if you're even hungry or not. You should have eaten something earlier today and not be starving anyway. If you happen to find that some reason you're not even hungry at the Holiday meal, it's usually very common for the host or hostess to say, hey take some with you! This can be easily eaten the next day or later. Remember, there's no law out there that says that tons of calories have to be consumed on the holiday itself.

If you're prone to a really big appetite, consider that you may not be getting enough sleep, and or quality of sleep. Having as much sleep as possible before the holiday meal is a great idea. This will hormonally prepare you to stave off cravings, and have the energy and mindset to move around more and make good and healthful choices.

If at all possible, it's important to exert energy as you normally should be doing every day anyway. Just because it's a holiday doesn't mean you can't go on a walk, in fact it's an even better time to do so! If the weather is bad outside, then extra chores and maybe just some floor exercises or some time on the exercise bike could be good ideas.



You have to remember the long-term goal, not the short-term satisfaction. Keep repeating herself the whole time, "do I want to blow all the good work I've done over the last few months in one meal?" - especially when, as stated earlier, all these foods are usually fairly accessible year-round. Keep envisioning your end goal at this meal time, and remember the true Reason for the Season, mentioned earlier.

Powerful ways to eat before you go and while you're there

Also helpful for those who love to eat, would be to get extra fiber and protein in your day before the main meal. Avoid anything very salty before the main meal as well during, because that will increase your appetite. If you're prone to overeating, keep up your water and non calorie beverage intake. This helps you fill up, feel better and think better, so you will be able to be more mindful during the holiday meal.

Dark, green leafy vegetables have also been found to contain substances that can curb cravings and appetite. Eat a good serving of these in a meal before you go, and chances are you won't feel like taking big scoops of food at your holiday meal.

We all need to have five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables per day and this doesn't stop just because it's a holiday. Once you're there in front of the bountiful food layout, the first thing you want to do when getting to a special meal—occasion such as this, is to **scout out all the vegetables and fruits that you like, and have those first**. Remind yourself that this is a great way to get in those 5-9 servings that are required for great health, then the protein, and then after all that, keep “a little room” for the less healthy items. This will certainly curb your appetite especially if you eat it slowly, before you put in front of you; the foods that really push your buttons!



If you master a 50/50 cauliflower mac and cheese, or a no-refined-sugar, vegan pumpkin pie with walnut crust, why do some still say the traditional, unhealthy version is "better"? Because we let our addiction to sugar and fat and additives win? Healthy food can be very tasty food. It's vitally important to remember this, and dare to be different. If it tastes great, and closer to God's natural foods, why should you care that others think? You could be changing minds, hearts and lives, and plant seeds over a holiday meal, while managing your own weight and health at the same time - a double win!

Getting to the core of what this holiday is all about.

Here's another great tip for those who are spiritual and even better yet a believer like I am. If you're not a Christian, you can customize this tip to fit your own faith. There are many versus that directly condemned greed, even food. **The Bible really focuses on relationships.** What better time of the year is there to focus on relationships and bonding than at Thanksgiving? Yet what has happened in our culture? Thanksgiving has turned more into who will bring what for the Big Meal, instead of catching up with others and really making connections.

If you go into the function with this mindset - How much can I catch up with people and bond with them, over, how many things I can eat and try and get full on - how do you think you would fare with your weight management goals?

How much more impressive will it be to friends and loved ones, when it looks like you're more interested in how they have been doing and catching up, than in Margie's scalloped potatoes and award-winning chocolate Bundt cake?

The tenets of the Christian faith put people, and caring for other people, over our own physiological and even emotional needs. The Bible does indicate that we need to take care of ourselves as well, with it describing **the body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit**. So it's not like we should be ignoring our own health either, whether it's physical or emotional. It's just that we really need to also focus on others outside ourselves as well. This is what I have called **spiritual eating**.

So what would spiritual eating look like at Thanksgiving? It probably would be seeing it as a time to catch up with others and show love towards each other, and not just focusing on the foods, and what will be made, and how it'll be made, and then gorging on it.

It would probably be to nourish ourselves with tasty food, in the presence of others while focusing on others and also focusing on a proper amount of food which is not much more than usual if more at all, oh, and most importantly - **giving thanks to God** for everything there and everyone there.



God says we are to fellowship with others, and not be greedy with food. If you go into the function with this mindset - *How much can I focus on people and bond with them and build them up, over, how many things I can eat and get full on* - how do you think you would fare with your weight management goals?

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. ~
Thessalonians 5:11

Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.
~ Proverbs 23: 20-21

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
~ Corinthians 10: 31

Food logging is a major tool to avoid weight gain.

I hear a lot of people and my clients say "*well I didn't log because I was on vacation or was out of town or I was on holiday. And I'm not going to count calories at that time.*"

This doesn't make any logical sense to me at all. If there was ever a time to log, it would be at a holiday meal or when you're out of town out of your routine. As a dietitian, I personally don't need to see client's meal of oatmeal and kale salads and smoothies on a routine basis as much as I need to see what they're eating when they're *out of town or on a vacation* or during a holiday. That's the time when food journaling is needed the most.

Even if you're super busy, there are times that you can log. Waiting for someone to get out of the bathroom or turn on the TV, waiting for the food to be ready - basically anytime that you're waiting or there is a lull or break, is a good time to connect with God and also catch up with your food journaling. God knows how many waiting opportunities there are in life! Before you get out of bed in the morning or when you just first go to bed or about to go to bed soon are other good times. The best time of all, if you can, is to log right at or right after a meal so you know what kind of calorie intake is available for the next meal.

Some people have the mind space, lifestyle and ability to just practice intuitive eating over calorie counting. If that is you and you're able to do it, then all the power to you! I have a lot of clients who really love the numbers and don't feel that stressed out at all about it and it helps them greatly. Some people like to do both, as both are really good skills to be able to do.

Beyond-usual strategies with food journaling

Like I mentioned earlier, **planning is key**. Most people are going into a Thanksgiving or holiday meal with some general expectation of what will be served. Maybe it's always going over to Uncle Bob's where he always makes the same air fryer turkey. Or Aunt Megan and her wonderful vegan pumpkin pie.

Whatever the case may be, you usually kind of know what will be served and it's seldom a major total wildcard of a meal. Especially in this era of covid-19, studies show that most people are just staying with immediate family members and not many other people to keep the crowds down.

So now you have some idea what will be served, go ahead and put it into your MyFitnessPal or other food journaling system. Write down the things that you know you definitely want to have, and do not want to sacrifice on. For example, for me it would be mashed potatoes. If there are pecan pie and mashed potatoes, that's what I would be consuming! **Log as many foods that you'd like to have ahead of time** that you know you want, in the portion that you think will be satisfying, but not excessive. Then, see how many calories you have left for the rest of the day.

This may only be enough for a protein shake or an egg white omelet or light tofu scramble in the morning. It's still important to eat, and **take care of your Temple of the Holy Spirit** (your body). Taking sufficient protein earlier in the day may help take the edge off cravings or things that you see around you that you know you should not have.

If you're doing great, and will be successful at weight management, then by the end of the day, your food journal, although may be containing some unusual foods for you, should be showing **an amount of food that is really not any more than usual**. That's because, despite it all, you're on a healthy journey and are trying to lose weight, that's what should win out.

A big misunderstanding about weight gain

One of my favorite holiday weight management tips happens after the meal, not before or during! If you are going to be eating a meal that was not prepared by yourself, then the chances of the scale going up a little bit the day after is extremely high because only for the reason of sodium intake. Oftentimes someone trying to lose weight will watch the amount of salt that they are putting in their meals, but when they go to eat a meal that was prepared by someone else, there's really little control over the amount of salt that's in it. It is extremely important to remember that **some of the weight gain is a little fluid fluctuation from extra salt intake**, especially if you feel you're doing everything else right.

If this happens to you when you were sure you didn't overeat but that the food may have been saltier than you usually eat, it is imperative to not freak out when you see the scale the next day, and just continue on with your normal weight management routine. In the next few days, just keep an eye on the amount of salt in your food as you usually do, and let the sodium levels stabilize in the next few days. Then, you will find that your weight has at least returned to where it was before the holiday meal.

So many people flip out over the scale going up by a couple pounds and then that derails them, and they get off of their weight management training because they're upset and feel hopeless. Sodium can definitely increase the body weight and make you feel you've gained fat when that's simply not true.

Other essential tips to consider

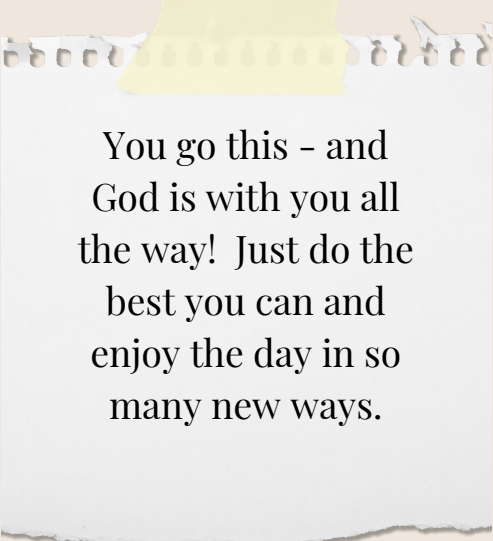
The most important factors in weight management are whether your overall intake is healthy and meeting all nutrient needs so you can thrive, not just survive. It is also that whatever type of monitoring you choose, if it is consistent over a very long time. Food journaling and/or intuitive eating should really continue on basically forever, or as long as you want to manage your weight. Lastly, you should enjoy your life so whatever methods you choose should be realistic, sustainable, and preferably made somehow to be enjoyable as well.

If you are the participant who has been invited to a holiday meal, I truly hope this article has helped you greatly. If you are the host or hostess, I would ask you this:

In what ways other than food, have you made the event favorably memorable and special?

- Was it the candles or lights and décor?
- Was it a spell-bounding activity that family and friends will remember for a long time to come?
- Was it great building up of others that will bring warmth to their hearts?
- Was it hugs and games or maybe a great show that you watched together?

Don't make your Thanksgiving just about food as the highlight. Make it about other things that are spiritual that will be cherished long after the meal has been digested.



You go this - and
God is with you all
the way! Just do the
best you can and
enjoy the day in so
many new ways.

In summary

A Thanksgiving or other Holiday meal can encourage spiritual eating - not weight gain and bad health - by:

- Keeping in mind the Reason for the Season - to be grateful for all we have, and not just the food!
- Keeping up food journaling, good sleep, hydration, avoiding stress etc. the same way as the rest of the year.
- Preparing mentally and physically to ride the time of the year that gives everyone the biggest excuse to give up on their health.
- Embracing and looking forward to healthy/healthier hacks of holiday favorites - and keep nutrition and self-care high throughout the holidays.
- Continuing nutrition up through a holiday, possibly eating lighter before a function but with adequate or extra protein and fiber and maintaining good hydration.
- Focusing on God in spirit and relationships, and His natural, whole foods (if any are present) during the event.

Applying these tips should keep weight gain at bay through the holidays! After reading my tips for successful holiday weight management, I hope you come forward with confidence in how to handle your next holiday meal! Speaking of thanks, thank you for reading my article!

