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Innovative Cost Management Services, Inc. December 2014

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like...

The dreaded "Holiday 15"! Most of us forget about the important stuff this time of year (things like healthy eating habits and exercise) during the season of family gatherings and feasts. They must have invented New Year's Resolutions for a reason, right? This year, try getting a head-start on that January 1st promise to get back on the exercise wagon and perhaps it won't be as difficult to undo the damage done from over a month's worth of excess carbs and sugars.

9 Strategies to Healthier Holidays¹

1. Bring Your Own Food

Contribute a healthy dish to a gathering to ensure there's something you can indulge in.

- Eat the best-for-you offerings first. For example, hot soup as a first course - especially when it's broth-based, not cream-based - can help you avoid eating too much during the main course.
- Stand more than an arm's length away from munchies, like a bowl of nuts or chips, while you chat so you're not tempted to raise your hand to your mouth every few seconds.
- Concentrate on your meal while you're eating it. Focus on chewing your food well and enjoying the smell, taste, and texture of each item. Research shows that mealtime multitasking (whether at home or a party) can make you pop mindless calories into your mouth. Of course, dinner-party conversation is only natural, but try to set your food down until you're finished chatting so you are more aware of what you're taking in.



2. Don't Go Hungry in the Mall

To cut down on the lure of the food court, never go to the mall on an empty stomach.

- Plan your shopping route so you don't pass the Cinnabon stand a dozen times. The obvious reason? Both sights and smells can coax you to eat, and with some vendors purposely wafting their aromas your way, saying no can feel impossible.
- Choose a proper restaurant over the grab-and-go food court whenever you can. And request a table away from loud sounds and distractions, which can cause you to eat more. The bright lights and noisy hard surfaces can speed up the rate at which you eat and lead to overeating.
- Avoid fast-food places that emphasize red in their color schemes. Red has been shown to stimulate the appetite more than many other colors, and many restaurants add it to their decor, in everything from the flowers on the tables to the squiggles on the plates.

3. Keep Track of What You Eat

Maintain a food diary to help you stay committed to your goals during this risky eating period.

- Weigh yourself daily and use that number to guide your actions. (Food diaries are helpful, but only if you're totally honest and diligent about recording every morsel you eat.) Research has shown that people who step on the scale every day and then act accordingly, either increasing their exercise or being stricter about their eating, are 82 percent less likely to regain lost weight than those who don't weigh as often.
- Zip yourself into your favorite pair of slim-fitting pants once a week and note how they fit. Too tight? Adjust your eating and exercise habits. Just right? Keep up the good work.



4. Eat Before Going to a Party

Before going out, have a healthy snack to curb your appetite.

- Eat breakfast. This has been shown to prevent overeating later in the day.
- Limit the number of high-calorie foods on your party plate. Research has shown that when faced with a variety of foods with different tastes, textures, smells, shapes, and colors, people eat more - regardless of their true hunger level. Cutting down on your personal smorgasbord can decrease what you end up eating by 20 to 40 percent.
- Choose foods wisely, filling up your plate with low-calorie items, such as leafy green salads, vegetable dishes, and lean proteins, and taking smaller portions of the richer ones. That way, you can eat a larger amount of food for fewer calories and not feel deprived.
- Pop a sugar-free mint in your mouth. When you've had enough (and don't want to eat more), the feeling of a fresh palate can curb additional noshing.

5. Keep Healthy Snacks at the Office

Stash healthy foods in your desk at work so you're not as tempted by the treats piling up at the office.

- Try to keep communal office goodies out of view, either in an area that isn't as highly trafficked as the kitchen or the break room, or in dark containers or covered dishes. In one study, people ate 26 percent more Hershey's Kisses when the candies were in clear dishes versus white ones. And when the chocolates were placed six feet away, the average person only ate four a day, as opposed to nine a day when they were within arm's reach.
- Before you allow yourself a splurge, do something healthy, like eating a piece of fruit, walking around the office for five minutes, or climbing a few flights of stairs.
- Plan on taking whatever tempts you home, and delay the daily indulgence until just before bedtime. At that point, you're less likely to crave another treat immediately than you would during your afternoon coffee break, especially if the whole box is not around.



6. Manage Portion Size

Take sensible portions so you don't end up eating too much.

- Use smaller plates and serving utensils. Try a salad or dessert plate for the main course and a teaspoon to serve yourself. What looks like a normal portion on a 12-inch plate or trough-like bowl can, in fact, be sinfully large. In one study conducted at the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University, even nutrition experts served themselves 31 percent more ice cream when using oversize bowls compared with smaller bowls. The size of the serving utensil mattered, too: Subjects served themselves 57 percent more when they used a three-ounce scoop versus a smaller scoop.
- Pour drinks into tall, skinny glasses, not the fat, wide kind. Other studies at Cornell have shown that people are more likely to pour 30 percent more liquid into squatter vessels.

7. Control Your Environment

You plan to use sheer willpower during large family dinners.

- Eat with a small group when you can. One study found that dining with six or more people can cause you to eat 76 percent more, most likely because the meal can last so long. (After an hour of staring at the stuffing, you're more likely to have seconds.) At a big sit-down supper, be the last one to start and the second one to stop eating.
- Sit next to a fellow healthy eater (there's strength in numbers). Or sidle up to that uncle who eats slowly, so his pace can slow yours.
- Wait for all the food to be on the table before making your selections. People who make their choices all at once eat about 14 percent less than do those who keep refilling when each plate is passed.
- Keep visual evidence around of what you're consumed so you don't forget. Leave an empty bottle of wine or beer in view and you'll be less tempted to drink more.

8. Keep Up the Exercise

You're determined to squeeze in at least one or two workouts a week, no matter how busy you get.

- Break it up. If you don't have time for your daily four-mile walk, do a few 10- or 15-minute spurts of exercise throughout the day (to accumulate the surgeon general's recommendation of 30 minutes a day). They can be just as effective at maintaining overall fitness as one continuous workout.
- Tell yourself that all the running around you're doing (cleaning for house guests, dashing through a million stores to find the perfect presents) can help keep your weight in check. In one Harvard study, people who were simply told that they did enough in their daily lives to meet the surgeon general's recommendations lost weight and body fat without consciously changing a thing. A possible reason? Believing that what they are doing was having a positive effect may have led to subtle changes in their overall health behaviors.



9. Choose Your Indulgences

You intend to stave off feelings of deprivation by allowing yourself a "cheat" day once a week.

- Plan in advance to eat a little more and be a little more flexible at this time of year, when you face daily temptations. That way, you can savor the culinary joys of the holidays a little more often and you'll be less likely to binge. For

instance, rather than inhaling four sugar cookies on your cheat day, allow yourself one as a dessert when the mood strikes. Then make one little switch during the day to account for those calories - maybe skipping that morning latte or cutting out an afternoon snack.

- Choose your indulgences wisely. Instead of wasting calories on foods that you can have at any time of the year, pick items that are truly special and unique to the season, like your grandmother's candied yams or your daughter's first batch of Christmas cookies.

Source: 1 Karen Asp, Real Simple <http://www.realsimple.com/health>



GotHealth?

Tip: To warm up cold feet, sprinkle a bit of cayenne pepper into your socks. This folk remedy may help warm your toes by increasing circulation and improving blood flow.