Holiday Eating:  
How to Have Your Cake and Eat It Too,  
*The Healthy Way*

In general, people gain about one pound during the holiday season, but, then, do not take off that pound. Year after year, each pound adds up! How can you stop that yearly gain?

Halloween and Thanksgiving have passed. Each has its challenges. So, what about holiday parties, holiday dinners, holiday gifts, and a celebration at New Year’s? What are your specific challenges in heart healthy eating?

**Make a Plan!** What can you do before an event, during the event, and following the event?

**Before an Event:**
1) Start the day with a healthy breakfast. High-fiber and high-protein breakfasts can include oatmeal with milk and fruit, an egg with spinach on whole wheat toast, Greek yogurt with nuts, or nut butter on a whole wheat English muffin.
2) Do not go longer than 3 to 5 hours without eating. Do not skip meals as you set yourself up for cravings and or overeating later in the day. Healthy snacks are appropriate.
3) Realize the value of carbohydrate, protein, and fat. Foods with simple carbohydrates are absorbed most quickly, then foods with complex carbohydrates take a bit longer to break down in your body, adding protein increases satiety, and adding healthy fats will lead to your feeling fuller for a longer period of time.
4) Eat a small snack with carbohydrate, protein and fat before going to an event so that you will not be that hungry at the event. (An example is a small bowl of cereal with milk.) Eating a snack before will also help you resist the temptation of eating the higher fat and higher calorie foods during the event.
5) Eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and plant based protein foods including beans and lentils, nuts, and seeds all have fiber that will help you to feel fuller.
6) Be mindful in your eating. Don’t eat with the television on or working at your computer. Enjoy the process of eating. Eat when you are hungry, and stop eating when you are just full. This is called “intuitive eating” which takes patience to practice, but is important in healthy eating. Go to our
Cardiac Therapy Foundation website for the 7 short segments on intuitive eating to remind yourself of the importance of this type of eating.

At the Holiday Event:
1) Because you have eaten a small satisfying snack before the party, you can select more wisely from the foods offered at the party, and take only those foods that you truly wish to taste.
2) Be selective in what you chose, and eat the healthiest foods available. Moderation is key.
3) Eat just until you are full, and not stuffed (a really uncomfortable feeling).
4) On the other hand, don’t pass up your favorite food or deprive yourself of some food you really want. You need only a small amount of that food to avoid feeling deprived. Depriving yourself only sets you up for overeating that food later on – even after the party-- when you will not enjoy its taste or the experience of eating it.
5) At a holiday dinner, make one plate of the foods you really want. And then, eat slowly—enjoying and savoring each bite.
6) Realize that when you are hungry, truly hungry, the food will taste much better. When you are just eating “to eat”, and not truly paying attention to the taste of that food, the food will not be that delicious or interesting to you. Situate yourself away from the food; don’t stand next to the buffet table.
7) Is it the food that you are most interested in while attending a holiday event, or is it the people there and the interesting conversations that you can have which will fill you most with the holiday spirit? Come prepared with some simple questions to start a conversation with someone new whom you have not met, or have questions for old pals.
7) If you drink, select your beverages wisely. Limit your intake to one (for women) or two (for men) alcoholic drinks per occasion. Be aware of the size of the glass in thinking about portions. A glass of mineral water with a lime or lemon can be quite refreshing.

After the Event:
1) Learn from the mistakes you make. If you overate, eat less at the next meal. Experience is a great teacher.
2) Consider the exercise you are getting during the holidays? Do you need to add more? Keep coming to CTF, and doing physical activity on the days when you do not come to CTF.
3) The bottom line is to prepare for the challenges during the holidays, have a plan that is healthful, and follow it. Thinking ahead should be part of your preparation for a healthy holiday season.
Hints from Secrets to Healthy Holiday Eating: Tufts Univ. Health and Nutrition Letter, 11/13:

- The spirit of holiday indulgence leads us to especially over-consume added sugars, saturated fats, sodium and alcohol. Nutritious choices can get squeezed out by candy, pastries, salty snacks, and holiday eggnog.

- Many holiday foods are high in calories and low in fiber—the perfect mix to cause a deficiency in satiety, meaning that you have to eat huge amounts of these types of foods to feel good and full. The sheer variety of foods at holiday times adds to the problem as well as the “social facilitators” of overeating such as the number of dinner guests and a party atmosphere.

- According to Susan Roberts PhD, director of Tufts HNRCA Energy Metabolism Laboratory, the gorging does not end when the party is over. Studies have shown that after eating particularly delicious food, you can expect to be hungrier, and eat more at your next sitting. Mechanically, this probably happens because our intestinal processes speed up for great food, emptying our stomachs more quickly. Scientists call this the “second meal” effect that creates a negative cycle of having one great meal, and then not being able to snap back to more sensible eating especially when you are attending holiday party after holiday party.

- Some foods you can take or leave, so if you are not that fond of a specific dish, don’t put it on your plate. If you are hosting a party, plan a menu with heart healthy items such low calorie vegetables, fruits, or whole grains.

- The metabolic effects of big meals or eating a lot at parties can make you hungry for one big meal after another. The best thing according to Roberts is to recover “satiety” first by putting yourself on a high fiber regimen the next morning and day eating high fiber cereals, legume dishes, and low carbohydrate-high fiber breads to see how quickly you can lose the urge to overeat. Holiday parties can be an invitation to unconscious eating. All those finger foods add up, lubricated by alcohol.

Making a plan: Before attending a holiday party, make a plan: visualize the party, the buffet table, the passed hors d’oeuvres (what foods will be really special to you, and which ones can you pass up?), and the selection of beverages. How much will you eat, and how much will you drink? What are your personal triggers? Where will you stand at the party in relation to the buffet table? Can you bring a healthy food to the party? Whom will you know? Do you expect to meet new people? What are key questions to ask of those you meet at the party?

Once you answer all of these questions, create your personal plan to reduce the surprises that might be in this social setting.

Then the day of the party, continue your normal eating, and eat a light snack with some protein and fiber before you go. Carry out the plan you have visualized – and have fun!!

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