

## Healthy Holiday Eating: You're Kidding, Right?

By Debbie Richardson, MA, RD / Optimal Nutrition

[www.optimalnutrition4U.com](http://www.optimalnutrition4U.com)

Hard to believe, but we are in the midst of the holidays and it seems they roll around faster and faster each year. An abundance of things arrive with the holidays; the reminder of God's greatest gift to us, the enjoyment of some of our most cherished family traditions, delectable foods, and the joy of watching children's eyes light up as they gaze upon glorious lights, decorations, and presents. Holidays could also be defined as, "the period between Thanksgiving and the New Year during which one gives, does, and eats too much and ends up feeling frazzled, fat and fatigued!" Sound familiar?

Most of us overdo during the holiday season and the consequences can last far into the New Year and longer. The average American gains 1-2 pounds during the holidays. While that may not sound like much, most of us never lose that excess weight and continue to collect additional pounds each new holiday season. Here are some helpful tips to try and make this year a "healthier" holiday celebration:

- Acknowledge that calorie consumption *will* go up but be ready to compensate for that by watching your portion sizes and adding more physical activity to your day.
- Don't avoid the "goodies" and feel deprived but allow yourself a certain amount of calories to "spend" on those delectables.
- Aim for the 80/20 rule. Make 80% of the calories you eat each day healthy choices and allow 20% of your calorie consumption to be "discretionary" calories.
- Be realistic and strive to maintain your weight. Trying to lose weight during the holidays can be a difficult task.
- Stick to your exercise routine as much as possible. If you don't have an exercise routine, this is a great time of year to begin to take some short daily walks.
- Get enough sleep. If we are sleep deprived, we tend to have less ability to control our appetite.
- Never skip a meal so you can "bank" those calories to use later. Usually we tend to overeat at the next opportunity to a *greater* extent.
- Watch for hidden calories in mixed drinks, punch recipes and other alcoholic beverages. These calories add up very quickly and do not displace calories of solid food. It's very easy to end up "drinking" more than a meal's worth of calories with just a couple of drinks.
- Jell-O salads are often mistaken as a low-calorie food. Many times they can be a big source of calories, sugar and fat with all the "mix-ins."
- Watch out for those bowls of crunchy snacks lurking on every coffee table. One serving of nuts is the size of a golf ball and contains about 200 calories. You see where this could go!
- At a buffet, eat one serving of a favorite dessert instead of several small servings of many different desserts.
- Because so many foods are high calorie and high fat this time of year, choose wisely. Ask yourself, "Is this worth the calories?" as you pick and choose.
- During the holiday season and beyond, always get your dressings or sauces on the side. Dip your fork into the sauce then skewer the food and take a bite.

- Split desserts. It's surprising how little of a sweet treat we need to feel satisfied.

Enjoy this blessed season with behaviors of moderation that allow us to come into the New Year with a feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment. Merry Christmas and a very blessed New Year!