

Savor the holidays without over-indulging

Written by meg sibal, m.d.

Friday, 16 December 2016 16:28



Statistics show that the average person gains about five pounds during the holiday season – while this may not seem like that much, the problem is most people don't lose the weight and, year after year, those pounds add up, says the November 2016 issue of the UCLA health Healthy Years.

A little nibbling instead of dinner may seem innocuous, but it's probably not – “Holiday parties often include buffets with lots of small bites and appetizers,” says registered dietitian Nancee Jaffe with the UCLA Digestive Health and Nutrition Clinic.

“This can lead people to believe they are eating less. For instance, that inevitable platter of cheese cubes looks harmless, but just two cubes can add up to 100 calories and nine grams of fat.”

These strategies are offered to help you without packing on the pounds or feeling like a curmudgeon:

- **Be beverage aware** – While sipping an adult beverage is part of holiday celebrations, it can result in a lot of added calories:

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- a) Alcohol can be a hidden source of calories – a cup has more than 200 calories and about 20 grams of sugar;
- b) Eggnog is loaded with fat, sugar and calories;
- c) A typical 8-ounce margarita has 240 calories;
- d) A five-ounce glass of wine or a twelve-ounce beer contains 160 calories;
- e) A 12-ounce can of cola has more than 150 calories; and
- f) Fresh orange juice has just over 100 calories: add alcohol and calories can double.

To better manage your consumption:

- a) Alternate each high-calorie beverage with sparkling or still water;
 - b) Make that juice festive and fizzy with sparkling water; or
 - c) Have a white wine spritzer; and
 - d) Fragrant and delicious hot or chilled fruit teas are other delicious low-calorie choice.
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- **Smart snacking strategies** – Although it may seem counter-intuitive to snack before you go out to a holiday party, it can help you avoid overeating – the key is not to arrive to a party starving, and thus being tempted to eat everything in sight.

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Choose protein and fiber combinations that help satisfy hunger – good choices include hard-boiled eggs and whole-grain bread; a whole banana with a tablespoon of peanut butter; or skinless chicken breast on a bed of baby spinach.

“The fun of eating during the holidays is to try a little bit of everything,” says Jaffe.

“The problem is most people serve themselves a normal portion size of every dish, and then over-consume. Instead, focus on two bites of each dish, so you get to try each without over-indulging.”

- **Size matters** – Studies show that individuals tend to eat more when the plates, bowls and even serving utensils are large.

Same is true when huge platters of food are actually on the dinner table.

a) A simple solution is buffet-style serving, in which guests have to get up and go to a separate table for a second helping.

b) “It sounds trite, but eat off a smaller plate,” says Jaffe.

“We eat with our eyes. Smaller plates look more full with less food. Research has shown we get the same satisfaction and level of fullness off less food on a smaller plate.”

c) The exception is vegetables and fruits – platters filled with salads, fruits, and other simply prepared steamed veggies can encourage individuals to eat more of these lower-calorie foods.

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d) Finally, if you're hosting, offer your guests take-home containers so they know that they can have some goodies to savor later.

• **Get physical** – After a meal, a simple stroll will aid digestion – you could have a little fun along the way by:

a) Setting up a scavenger hunt ahead of time; or

b) If there are dogs, there is no better time to take your four-legged friends for a walk, especially if he or she has been hanging around the table to help clean up those stray bits of food that guests have “accidentally” dropped on the floor;

c) Dancing is another way to get a little movement, and encourage social interaction among your guests – have your guests suggest their favorite tunes to inspire everyone to get into the act.

Most older adults require fewer calories than in their younger years – The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends the following for adults over age 50:

a) Moderately active women should consume 1,800 calories per day; and

b) Men no more than 2,400 calories per day.

To find out how many daily calories you need, go to the American Cancer Society web page: www.Cancer.org/healthy/tool-sandcalculators/calculators/app/calorie-counter-calculator.