

10 Strategies to Stay On Track During the Holidays

Just like anything in life, preparation is key to staying lean and healthy during the holidays. I've found these 10 strategies help my patients stay on track in even the toughest social situations.

1. Remember your goals. Think about the way you want to feel before you hit those holiday parties and dinners. If you want to feel great, you're less likely to indulge in foods and activities that make you feel less than great. Set an intention for how you would like to feel after each meal and hold yourself accountable by sharing with a close friend or family member. Or write it down and post it on your bathroom mirror to read after the event.
Sometimes treating yourself to sugary and other pleasure foods is exactly what the moment calls for; however, most of the time, you'll feel better off if you don't indulge in these foods containing the recreational drug I fear most!
2. Become the host. If you can, host your own party and take the opportunity to introduce your guests to the healthy foods you've been enjoying. Controlling food choices becomes easier when you have your own gathering.
3. Don't deviate from the norm. If you know you're going to attend a lavish party, begin your day as you would any other. Don't skip meals to save calories or carbohydrates. Eat a protein- and healthy-fat-packed snack an hour before your holiday meal like celery sticks with nut butter or a protein shake. Protein and fat help cut cravings for sugar and processed carbs.
4. Start your holiday meal with smart food choices. Beginning with soup, fresh veggies or a salad and avoiding appetizers filled with refined flour and other unhealthy choices can prevent cravings. Look for the vegetable board or other healthy options as snacks or appetizers. Volunteering to bring something to every gathering you attend guarantees there's a healthy choice.
5. Avoid or limit alcohol. Alcohol reduces your inhibitions and can lead you down a slippery slope of making bad choices. Most types of alcohol are also filled with sugar and empty calories. Instead, bring or ask for sparkling water with lemon or lime. Drink two glasses of water with lemon before a meal.
6. Stay active and people-focused rather than entirely dwelling on food. Plan an activity to look forward to after the meal like a group walk, visiting with other friends or family, a group game or playing with younger family members. Offering to clean up and help your host helps prevent overeating or reaching for dessert. I like to sit next to someone I find genuinely interesting and engage in conversation with them.
7. Practice mindfulness. Take five deep breaths before your meal and chew every bite slowly. Really focus on the flavors, colors and smells of your food. Try to put your fork down between bites, and breathe through your nose while you eat. Express gratitude with others before your meal. Halfway through your meal, I recommend putting your fork down and taking a pause. Take three deep breaths and assess your hunger on scale of 1 to 10. Ask yourself how much more you need to feel satisfied yet energized and comfortable.
8. Remember food can be medicine. Eat healthy and enjoy your time with loved ones. Take the time to enjoy healthy, wholesome meals with your friends and family and remember that you can heal your body and mind with each forkful of delicious food you enjoy.
9. Respond to pushers politely. Occasionally, you might have a food pusher, friend or relative ask you why you're not indulging at a party. When this happens to me, I reply I'm here for the people, not the food. No one argues or feels insulted.
10. Don't beat yourself up. If you do happen to slip up, leave guilt behind. Guilt is a toxic emotion that creates more damage. When things get out of control (which they do), simply make a gentle U-turn. Think of this as a GPS for the soul. Your GPS doesn't yell at you, call you stupid or judge you for taking a wrong turn. In the sweetest voice imaginable, the GPS reminds you to take the next possible U-turn. If you indulge a little, that's fine. Did you enjoy the process? How did you react to the food that you ate? Pay attention and move on by making a U-turn and getting back to the foods and activities that make you feel great.