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Holiday-Proof Your Diet

Learn our secrets for enjoying your favorite foods without gaining weight.

Even if you've been good all year long, the holidays can spell serious trouble for your hips (not to mention your thighs and tummy). "People go into the season almost expecting to gain weight, so they just accept it," says Marjorie Geiser, R.D., a nutritionist and personal trainer in California. "Decide ahead of time that you don't want to put on those pounds and you can create strategies to avoid them." Get ready to make merry—minus the extra pounds.

Healthy habits to get you through the holidays

Navigating your way through office parties and family get-togethers can be especially daunting if you're concerned about your waistline. The key to steadying the scale is to make small changes, says Tara Gidus, R.D., an Orlando-based dietitian and American Dietetic Association spokeswoman.

1. Plan ahead Never leave home for a party without having a small snack first, so you're not ravenous when you arrive, suggests Cathy Nonas, R.D., assistant clinical professor at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City and author of *Outwit Your Weight*. At the party, plan to occupy your hands (and mouth) by sipping seltzer or a wine spritzer.
2. Indulge—a little Allow yourself mini-portions—about half of what you'd normally eat—of the holiday foods you love most (like candied yams and gingerbread cookies). Bypass rich ones you can get year-round (cheese and crackers, chips and dip, brownies).
3. Write it down Now's the perfect time to start a food diary. This year, go high-tech by tracking what you eat in your PDA with software like *Weight-By-Date Mobile* (available at palm.mobiletopsoft.com) or *CalorieKing.com Handheld Diet Diary* (calorieking.com/software). Just knowing you're keeping track of what you're eating makes you more likely to scrutinize what you put in your mouth.
4. Look before you load Working your way aimlessly down the buffet line is a recipe for disaster. First, scope out what's available. Then put your selections onto the smallest plate available, like a salad plate.
5. Limit libations Slash calories by downing a couple of glasses of water before the festivities begin. That way, you won't be tempted to quench your thirst with high-cal cocktails.
6. Beware of the after-party "Don't blow it on the leftovers," says Nonas. Prevent day-after bingeing by getting out of the house. Go to a museum or get a manicure.
7. Downsize your workout Instead of ditching exercise entirely, opt for mini-workouts. Just 30 minutes of activity three times a week is all you need to keep your fitness habit going until you have time to step up your routine again.
8. Talk it out Your friends probably share your frustrations, so devise strategies together. Swap healthy holiday recipes, and make a pact to serve fruit for dessert at the next get-together.