9 Stay-Healthy Tips for the Holidays

BY BRENDA SCHMERL AT READER’S DIGEST

1. Keep the focus on fun, not food
Most holidays are associated with certain foods. Christmas at your house might not be the same without your aunt's green bean casserole, but that doesn't mean food has to be the main focus. Instead, throw yourself into the other rituals a holiday brings, whether it's caroling or tree trimming.

2. Modify your eating times so that they jive with your relatives'.
Do your in-laws' meal schedules fly in the face of yours? Here's how to compromise: Say they wake up later than you do and serve a late breakfast at 10:30. Then they skip lunch and serve Christmas 'dinner' at 3 p.m. To keep your blood sugar steady without overdoing it on calories, have an early-morning snack (such as a piece of whole-grain toast) before your relatives rise and shine. Their late breakfast will count as your 'real' breakfast, plus some of your lunch. Enjoy the 3 p.m. meal - but don't overdo it! - and have a small snack at around 8 p.m.

3. Cut down your own Christmas tree.
Rather than buying a tree from a roadside lot where the trees have been drying out for weeks, visit a tree farm that allows you to cut your own. It will be fresher and probably less expensive than they are at the lot. You'll burn off calories and combat some of the blood-sugar effects of the sugar cookie you snuck by traipsing around the grounds in search of just the right tree. And your family will have one more fond holiday memory to look back on.

4. Indulge in only the most special holiday treats.
Skip the store-bought cookies at Christmas, but do save some calories in your 'budget' to sample treats that are homemade and special to your family, such as your wife's special Yule log cake. Training yourself what to indulge in and what to skip is much like budgeting your mad money: Do you want to blow it on garbage that you can buy anywhere or on a very special, one-of-a-kind souvenir? Just don't completely deprive yourself on festive days - your willpower will eventually snap, and you'll end up overeating.

5. Make the change!
The habit: Staying physically active during the holidays. The result: Gaining less weight over the years. The proof: A study conducted by the U.S. government found adults gained, on average, more than a pound of body weight during the winter holidays - and that they were not at all likely to shed that weight the following year. (That may not sound like a lot now, but it means having to buy roomier pants after a few Christmases pass.) The good news is that the people who reported the most physical activity through the holiday season showed the least weight gain. Some even managed to lose weight.

6. Stock the freezer with healthy meals.
Everyone's overly busy during the holidays, and most of us want to spend our time shopping, decorating, or seeing friends and family, which leaves less time to cook healthy meals. Take defensive action several weeks ahead of time by cooking meals intended specifically for the freezer. You'll be thankful later when you can pop one of the meals into the oven or microwave and turn your attention instead to writing out holiday cards with a personal message in each.

7. Pour the gravy and sauces lightly.
You may not be able to control what's being served at a holiday meal, but you can make the turkey, roast beef, and even mashed potatoes and stuffing much healthier by foregoing the sauce or gravy or spooning on just a small amount.

8. Take the focus off food and drinks this holiday season by embracing a project that will have lasting meaning: Organizing your family photos.
What household doesn't have a mountain of snapshots that need to be sorted? Dispensing with this source of clutter will be stress relief in itself, but you also will get an emotional lift when you glimpse the photos again. (Plus, what better holiday gift to give yourself or someone you love than a gorgeous album filled with family memories?) As you go through each envelope of photos, slide the very best into an album, file other photos you want to keep into the appropriate category in your shoebox, and throw out the rest.

9. Toast the New Year with just one glass of bubbly.
You may be celebrating, but that doesn't mean that you should send your meal plan (and your judgment) on holiday. Alcohol can interfere with your blood sugar by slowing the release of glucose into the bloodstream; it also contain a lot of calories - 89 calories per glass of white wine or champagne, 55 calories in a shot of vodka, and 170 calories in a pint of stout beer. What's more, alcohol breaks down your inhibitions and judgment, which makes you that much less likely to resist the junk foods that you would other-
Herb and Citrus Buttered Roasted Turkey

Ingredients
1 lemon
1 c. butter
1/2 c. shallot
8 large sage leaves
2 tbsp. fresh thyme leaves
1 tbsp. rosemary leaves
1 clove garlic
1 fresh whole turkey
1 medium onion
2 carrots
2 celery ribs
Kitcher string
1 c. dry white wine
1 c. low-sodium turkey or chicken broth
1/4 c. all-purpose flour

Instructions
Zest and juice lemon to equal 3 tablespoons into the bowl of a food processor; add butter and next 5 ingredients. Process until very smooth and herbs are minced. Reserve and chill 1/4 cup herb butter.

Heat oven to 425 degrees F. Remove giblets and neck from turkey and discard. Drain cavity well; pat dry with paper towels. Loosen and lift skin from turkey breast without totally detaching skin.
Rub 3 tablespoons herb butter under skin; replace skin and secure with wooden picks if desired. Sprinkle cavity and outside of turkey with desired amount of salt and freshly ground pepper.

Arrange onion and next 2 ingredients in a large roasting pan. Place turkey, breast side up, on a lightly greased roasting rack in pan. Tie ends of legs together with kitchen string; tuck wingtips under. Rub entire turkey with remaining herb butter. Pour wine and chicken broth into roasting pan.

Bake on lowest oven rack at 425 degrees F for 30 minutes. Reduce temperature to 325 degrees F and cook 2 to 2 hours 30 minutes or until a meat thermometer inserted into thickest portion of thigh registers 165 degrees F; basting every 30 minutes with pan juices. Shield with aluminum foil to prevent excessive browning, if necessary. Remove from oven, and let stand 20 minutes.

Transfer turkey to a serving platter. Pour drippings through a fine wire-mesh strainer into a bowl, discarding solids. Reserve 2 1/2 cups pan drippings.
Melt reserved chilled butter in a saucepan over medium heat; whisk in flour, and cook, whisking constantly, 1 to 2 minutes. Gradually add reserved 2 1/2 cups pan drippings.

“APPY” HOUR
Focus: Eating Healthy

Substitutions
Handy in the supermarket as well as the kitchen, this app offers alternatives for foods you wish to avoid. It also gives tips for ingredients you can swap in a pinch if you’re in the middle of cooking something and realize you’re missing a key item.

Fooducate
I can read a few different languages, but the nutrition information on food labels is not one of them. And I know I’m not alone. This app lets you scan the barcode of a product or type its name (or a kind of food, like “banana”) to uncover its total calories, fat, sodium and other ingredients. It also “scores” the food for healthiness and lets you know if the smoothie that advertises itself as super-wholesome is actually packed with calories.

True Food
According to the nonprofit Center for Food Safety, more than 70% of all packaged foods on our supermarket shelves contain genetically modified ingredients — GMIs — and in the USA, GMOs (the O is for “organisms”) don’t need to be labeled. There is some debate about how dangerous genetically modified foods may be for our bodies and the environment. But if you want to avoid these products, you’ll appreciate True Food.