

Tips to avoid holiday stress eating

For many, the holidays can bring stress and uncertainty around how to cope with feelings that may arise. The mounting pressure we feel to make this time of year perfect coupled with busy schedules and lots of holiday foods surrounding us at every turn can feel overwhelming. The good news is, if you have a solid plan in place to help you cope with the stress of the holiday season, it can make all the difference for you. Here are five tips to help you successfully avoid stress around food this holiday season.

1. Practice flexibility and remove moral judgments about food: Many of us struggle with food mainly because we label foods as good or bad and try to limit foods accordingly. Try to adopt a flexible approach to what and when you'll eat depending on what food is available, your body's needs, and what you really enjoy.

2. Make sure you are eating enough: All too often we go into holiday meals and parties having "saved up" all day to try to compensate for the rich foods we are going to eat. Just because you may eat a little more later in the day doesn't mean you should skip meals or restrict your food intake earlier. Your body still needs fuel and energy to function. Restriction can be a set-up for binge eating, and a stressful way to enter a gathering. When we get overly hungry it can be hard to know when we have had enough, which may leave us feeling uncomfortably full as a result.

3. Rethink how you view food and gatherings: There is a reason so much of our life is centered around food—breaking bread together is one of the greatest gifts we have. When we gather together for an event or celebration, food is a beautiful part of that connectivity that we get to experience. Instead of focusing on the foods that you might be fearful of or concerned about overdoing it with, pay attention to the present moment and the people you are with. There is something connective about sharing from a communal bowl together (barring food allergies that prevent this from happening). Reframing how you think of parties and group meals can go a long way in removing the stress around the food that will be there.

4. Take care of your overall and emotional health: We are much more than what we eat, yet sometimes if we aren't taking care of ourselves, we may make decisions around how we eat that don't help us feel our best. By making sure we are getting enough sleep, eating nutritious foods, drinking plenty of water, and keeping our bodies active, we can help care for our overall health. It is important to not try to "burn the candle at both ends" and to focus on rest during this often frantic and busy time. The holidays can also bring up painful memories or family dynamics that we need to devote time and space to processing and working through with a trusted friend, family member, or therapist. While it can be normal to occasionally turn to food for enjoyment and comfort, if it's becoming an unhealthy coping mechanism, we need to practice other coping skills and seek genuine community to help us navigate the feelings and stress that may arise during this season.

Allowing ourselves to have the foods we enjoy without guilt can remove a lot of the stress of holiday eating and help us truly enjoy what we eat. While we can't go around eating cinnamon rolls at every meal, if we change our frantic pace, remove the food rules, and focus on our true needs and desires, we won't want to. Enjoy the holidays, be kind to yourself and others, and take care of yourself including a healthy chiropractic adjustment!



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