

What Is Your Filter for a Healthy Holiday?

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Each year as we near the rapid succession of holidays from Halloween to Thanksgiving to Christmas, people too often give up on their health goals during this time. Weight gain during the holidays may be the result of throwing all restraint out the window or employing too much restraint, leading to deprivation-driven eating. Instead of either extreme this year, try setting some filters for healthier holidays. In other words *have* the things you love, but be strategic and be mindful with where you spend your calories, sugar and saturated fat. Think “Maintain, don’t gain” during this holiday. Try these filters to start the new year further ahead on your wellness goals:

1. **Be selective at buffets, parties, and holiday dinners**

First, fill *half* your plate with fruits and vegetables. Second, choose the one food on the table that it would not be that holiday without and let that be one-eighth of the plate. Third, on the rest of your plate put one dollop the size of one heaping tablespoon of other foods you would like to try. Think of this as your sample platter—you have had your favorite thing, but you have also had your fruits and veggies while trying a little bit of everything offered.

2. **Minimize your exposure to tempting foods, but allow yourself to have them**

Retail stores put out holiday items earlier every year increasing the time we are around the foods associated with each one. Keep the high-sugar, high-fat, and high-calorie foods out of the house until immediately before the holiday to minimize your exposure to tempting foods. Send foods home with guests, take some to work, and reduce the amount you make or buy so not as much is leftover.

3. **Avoid “all-or-none” thinking**

We think we do well when we eat like a bird until we feel starved and then we eat like a horse. This is “all-or-none” thinking at its worst. Eat smaller portions every 3-5 hours and balance your meals and snacks by having two to three food groups each time you eat to avoid overeating at your next meal.

4. **Choose your “low-hanging fruit” and then set your filter for change this holiday**

Set a filter for how often you will allow yourself to have a food you know occurs too often in your diet. If you currently drink two cans of soda per day (worth 29 pounds of weight loss per year if the calories are not replaced), then aim for one can per day, then one every other day, and so on. This works with anything—sweets, chips, ice cream, etc.

If cookies or cake at your workplace are your downfall, set a criteria for them so you have them less frequently, e.g. only indulge in them if the items are from a local bakery or home-made rather than store-bought. You will enjoy them more but have them less frequently unless you are surrounded by bakers.

5. Prepare for the party circuit

If you have lots of parties to attend this holiday, choose ahead of time which ones you will allow yourself to indulge in and which ones you will eat more sensibly. **Hint:** the sensible ones **must** outnumber the splurges (e.g. Set a filter that 25% of the parties will be splurges). Take your own healthy options to parties so you know that you have something to eat that will not sabotage your efforts.

If you would like more tips for healthy holiday foods that taste great, please join A & M AgriLIFE and Love to Live Well for a “Healthy Cooking For The Holidays” workshop on November 9th from 9-11 am at the Joseph A. Carroll Building, 401 W Hickory, Denton TX 76201. Cost is \$35 (Cost for seniors over age 65 is \$25). See https://www.lovetolivewell.com/Take_a_Class.html for more information and to register. We wish you a healthy and happy holiday!

Anna Love PhD, RDN, LD, MCHES, CIC

Dietitian, Health Coach, and Founder of Love to Live Well

Master Wellness Volunteer, Texas A & M Agrilife Extension

877-978-9355

anna@lovetolivewell.com

