

7 Simple Steps To Staying Healthy During The Holidays

By Dionne Ross



The season of splurging is just around the corner and we will spend more money than usual and exercise less. We also eat more and more of the wrong things.

If you are pursuing a goal of losing weight before the holidays, chances are you will fall off the wagon – and stay off until January 1. To that end, here are several tips to keep you on track through the holidays and to help you begin 2009 on a healthy note.

1. Get Organized!

We've heard the adage, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." You could almost bet money that during the holidays you will splurge and feel guilty about it later. It's best to have a clear understanding of your limits. This year, be prepared with the following tips:

- Before attending a family feast, write down your goal.
- Learn which entrées will be served, then list what kind and how much of each food you can have. Allow yourself to indulge, but understand your limits.
- Make this list clear and concise so you can't compromise your plan.

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Photo by Dale Rempert

2. Get Focused!

The beauty of going away for the holidays is the opportunity to temporarily escape the stresses of everyday life. The problem is we tend to neglect some of the most fundamental things, like our quest for better health. Remind yourself of your goal to help withstand temptation. Write down your goal and post it in places you can't avoid.

- Summarize your fitness goal into two to three words or a picture (e.g., goal weight: 140 pounds, heart disease-free or a picture of Angela Bassett).
- Post the phrase or image onto something you can't miss (bathroom mirror or the refrigerator).

3. Get to Cooking!

Too many of us leave all the cooking to our grandmothers or aunts who have been cooking for years at family gatherings. We're not sure just what makes their food taste so good, we just know it's delicious. This year, be more aware of what you're putting in your body by doing the some of the cooking yourself. Let your grandmother know you'll provide the turkey this year. It gives her a break, and serves your family a healthy food.

- Visit www.foodfit.com to find healthy recipes for traditional holiday foods.

4. Get Creative!

We all know the holiday bulge doesn't just come from Thanksgiving and Christmas meals. Brownies, chocolate-covered strawberries, sugar-coated trail mix and cookies brought in by your co-workers also add unwanted pounds. Instead of bringing in more artery-clogging treats, provide your co-workers with some healthy alternatives.

- Bring in fresh fruit and veggies to work
- Visit www.free-gourmet-recipes.com for healthy snacks disguised as delicious desserts.

5. Get Moving!

Traditionally, quality time with loved ones involves stuffing our faces. Unfortunately, there are countless other ways to bond with family that we never experience. Some of the best memories happen when we try something new. This holiday season create some new memories with activities you've never done before as a family.

- Plan an outside activity everyone can participate in.

6. Get Away!

I'm not sure how most families operate, but in mine everyone takes naps after our meal. We then wake up and eat more. This cycle continues at least two more days. The problem is we display desserts in the kitchen and dining room, constantly reminding ourselves of all the good food available. I have found myself preparing a plate when I wasn't hungry, and just because the food was there. Don't fall into that trap this year. Take the following steps:

- After everyone finishes their meal, pack away the food, including desserts, in the refrigerator and freezer. Clean the kitchen entirely.
- Plan social activities after the meal outside of the house.

7. Get Real!

I would be crazy if I told you to not touch any sweets throughout the holidays; you'd be even crazier if you placed that expectation on yourself. When we set unattainable goals, we then beat ourselves up for not achieving them and become discouraged. The danger in getting discouraged is not only that we lose the confidence to correct what we messed up, but we tend to want to throw in the towel altogether. When we stop trying and caring, we revert to our old destructive habits. You're going to make this year different, here's how:

- Give yourself the grace to be human.
- If you mess up, Don't Give Up!
- Remember this is a lifestyle, not a diet; fitness is a journey.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying a good holiday meal with your family. The trouble comes when you exceed your limit. People who stay fit throughout the holidays have a clear understanding of their goals, and they anticipate the obstacles that could hinder their accomplishment. They then plan ahead and take the necessary actions to succeed. Unfortunately, sheer will power just is not enough.

As you remain loyal to your quest toward good health, you inspire others to do the same. Some of us have family members in bad health who make destructive choices for their bodies. Because we love them, we try to convince them to change. When you visit them this holiday season, try to spend less time preaching to them and more time leading by example. **UIM**

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