

Managing Holiday Feasts

By Suze Hargraves

The first major feast of the holiday season is right around the corner. Usually Thanksgiving is also the start of an accumulation of “holiday pounds” resulting from overindulgence. Some folks would have you eating lean everything with steamed everything else, but reality is that, most likely, there will be mashed potatoes with gobs of butter, gravies and a green bean casserole that’ll make your gallbladder scream for mercy. These types of foods are part of most family traditions. The good news is that we can survive with our waistlines in tact.

So how do we, at the very least, maintain our weight in the face of all this holiday goodness? We make healthier choices. Am I delusional enough to believe this sort of restraint will be easy when faced with a smorgasbord of culinary delights? No. We’re going to need a strategy.

1. The first thing to keep in mind is that Thanksgiving dinner is not an “all you can eat” challenge. It’s dinner.
2. Fill half of your plate vegetables. Okay so maybe they’re sauced or buttered but it’s still most likely a better choice than half a plate of mashed potatoes with gravy and twenty-seven buttered rolls.
3. Slow down and take the time to taste the food. Let your senses take in the smells, textures and flavors.
4. Pass on the obvious troublemakers like butter and gravy.
5. Don’t eat more than usual. The only thing that gets stuffed should be the bird.
6. Drink water with your meal. Water helps us feel fuller faster.
7. If your choices expand to other traditional main dishes like ham or lasagna choose the one you truly want. Don’t go for the “combo” plate. You don’t need all that food.
8. Think small. You can sample more things if you keep your portions small.
9. Remember that any drinks you consume also contain calories. Don’t let them sneak up on you.
10. Try new things: If your host is offering a new dish as a more health conscious alternative give it a try. Don’t feel that you have to stick to only traditional foods.

If you’re the cook there are many ways you can feed your crew the traditional menu but still keep the fat and calories under control. Make sensible substitutions when cooking. Go for fat free or low fat choices in sour cream, cheese, soups and other traditionally fatty ingredients. Offer guests healthy options like veggie or fruit trays, no-sugar added pies and cakes and put veggies on the table with butter or sauce served on the side. When you offer your guests healthy choices along with the traditional foods, you may very well find that, because people are more health conscious these days, the healthier choices will be the more popular items on the table.

Enjoy your holiday celebrations but remember to treat your body kindly. You’ll thank yourself when you realize you don’t have to make that New Year’s resolution to lose those holiday pounds!

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