



Holiday Eating for Health and Enjoyment

Amanda Thul, RD, LD

The holiday season is upon us! No matter what holiday you celebrate, there will be food and lots of it! Holidays and family gatherings are usually centered around food...food that is typically more indulgent than our everyday diet. Even if you don't realize it, our traditional holiday eats and treats causes stress and guilt based on what we've been told about what food is good/bad for us. As you start discussing the approaching holidays, I want you to observe how many times you or someone you're talking to brings up holiday eating. You may hear things like "I know I shouldn't but I'm going to eat X" or "I usually love X but I can't eat it this year because it's full of sugar." Comments like these say we can't enjoy our holiday goodies or even the holiday season completely because we also feel a sense of guilt when eating those foods. People view having gatherings focused around food as a bad thing. Truth is, food will always be part of our holidays and I want you to enjoy it 100% this year. Healthy holiday eating is not about turning all of your favorite foods to low calorie foods but rather it's about taking a step back and relaxing a little bit with food choices. Finding the balance with eating different types of food, enjoying your food, and respecting how your body is feeling with each bite you take.

We all have special holiday foods that we look forward to eating every year. Cutting these out completely leaves us unsatisfied both physically and emotionally and yearning for something more to eat (even if you're full!). Finding ways to incorporate your traditional holiday foods is important. Instead of focusing on the calorie or macro content of the foods, change your attention to savoring your favorite holiday foods and how your body will feel after eating (drowsy, GI upset, bloated or energized, satisfied but not stuffed, feeling good overall). Using those 2 things as your guide, prioritize what and how much goes on your plate.

Be selective with the foods that go on your plate. Don't eat something just because it's there or you don't want to upset someone who is pushing you to eat a certain food. It's okay to say "no" if you don't want to eat it. We all have foods that we feel better after eating and ones that make us feel yucky afterwards. Focus on eating more of the foods that make you feel good and try to leave the other foods off your plate. Make a priority to save room on your plate for your favorite foods, no matter the calorie content, especially if you don't eat them very often. Have just a few bites or leave completely off your

plate the foods that you eat frequently or only eat because they're there but don't necessarily care for. This increases the satisfaction with your meal which means 30 minutes later you won't be rummaging around looking for something to eat to fill the gap of your missing favorite foods.

Stopping when you're full is key to helping you feel your best after you eat. Your body needs time to communicate your fullness cues and can easily be missed if you're a fast or distracted eater. So, don't rush your meals. Remove distractions, like phones and TVs, and take multiple moments to set your fork down between bites and observe how your body is feeling. Respect your fullness by retiring your fork when you feel full, your hunger is gone, but you're not yet uncomfortable.

The key to healthy holiday eating is listening to your body. Pay attention to how you're feeling with each food, how your hunger/fullness level is, and respecting the holiday traditions around food. Bonus of following these tips? You're naturally helping to manage your calories and weight over the holiday without counting anything or stressing about what you should/shouldn't be eating.

Be gentle with yourself this holiday season. Give yourself permission to enjoy your food, without guilt, for a fulfilled holiday eating experience.