

A warm, bokeh-lit holiday dinner table. In the foreground, a clear glass sits on a white plate. To the left, a lit candle in a glass holder casts a soft glow. In the background, a white napkin is tucked under a silver fork. The overall atmosphere is cozy and festive.

Healthy Holiday

EASY STRATEGIES TO PREVENT
HOLIDAY WEIGHT GAIN AND
KICKSTART THE NEW YEAR
ON A HEALTHY PATH

Common Holiday Challenges

The holiday season is brimming with excitement, cherished traditions, and joyful celebrations. It's that special time when we gather with family and friends to enjoy delicious meals, exchange gifts, and create unforgettable memories. However, amidst the festive joy and glimmer, we face two significant challenges: a lack of time and the allure to overindulge.

Challenge 1: Too Much To Do, Not Enough Time

As the holiday season approaches, the whirlwind of shopping, decorating, attending events, and meal preparations can make the days seem to fly by. This feeling is particularly intense if you are the host or responsible for cooking for a large family gathering. The stress of getting everything accomplished can transform what should be a joyful time into a hectic experience.



Challenge 2: The Temptation to Overindulge



Holiday feasts typically feature an abundant array of rich, delectable dishes, ranging from creamy mashed potatoes to indulgent pies. While it's delightful to savor these seasonal delights, the temptation to overeat can be strong, especially when faced with such a wide variety of enticing choices.

Time-Saving Strategies

Meal Prep

Begin with Pre-Prepared Ingredients

Using pre-prepared ingredients can significantly reduce your kitchen time while still maintaining great flavor and nutrition. Here are some tips to simplify your holiday meal preparation:

- **Semi-Homemade Solutions:** Opt for store-bought rotisserie chicken, pre-made pizza dough, or pre-chopped vegetables to minimize preparation time. Personalize these items with your favorite sauces and seasonings to achieve a homemade touch with little effort.
- **Frozen and Canned Essentials:** Stock your pantry with frozen vegetables, canned beans, and pre-cooked grains like frozen quinoa or rice. These staples can be quickly transformed into side dishes or incorporated into soups and casseroles.

Batch Cooking for Greater Efficiency

Batch cooking is an excellent way to save time in the kitchen. By preparing large quantities of food at once, you'll have ready-to-eat meals or ingredients that can be utilized throughout the week.

- **Cook Once, Enjoy Twice:** Prepare extra rice, roasted vegetables, or proteins that can be incorporated into various dishes. For instance, grilled chicken can enhance salads, wraps, or pasta meals.
- **Make Essentials in Bulk:** At the start of the week, boil a dozen eggs, roast multiple sweet potatoes, or grill additional chicken breasts. These staples can be swiftly assembled into meals during busy holiday periods.

Sheet Pan and One-Pot Meals

Minimizing cleanup after cooking can save you valuable time, so aim for meals that use fewer dishes.

- **Sheet Pan Dinners:** Prepare your proteins and vegetables all on one sheet pan. This method allows you to create a complete meal with minimal cleanup.
- **One-Pot Meals:** Dishes like stews, soups, and casseroles made in a single pot (or Instant Pot) streamline both cooking and cleaning. Simply combine all your ingredients in one container, set it, and let it cook!

Avoiding Overindulging

Arrive Prepared

Have a light snack before attending a holiday event to help prevent overeating.



Stay Hydrated

Staying hydrated can help minimize hunger pangs, and mocktails offer a fun, non-alcoholic twist to holiday beverages. Make sure to drink water before and during meals to effectively manage your appetite.

Portion Control

Utilize Smaller Plates: This technique aids in managing portion sizes. Research indicates that individuals tend to consume less food when served on smaller dishes.

Focus on Vegetables and Proteins: Begin by filling your plate with salads, vegetables, and lean proteins. Once you feel satisfied, treat yourself to smaller servings of your favorite indulgences.

Balance Healthy Options & Treats

It's perfectly fine to enjoy your beloved holiday treats, but maintaining balance is essential.

One-Plate Rule: Serve yourself one plate filled with a diverse selection of foods, and resist the temptation for seconds. Take the time to appreciate each bite and focus on the overall experience, rather than just the food itself.



HEALTHY HOLIDAY TIPS



Bring a healthy dish to share

Headed to party and aren't sure if there will be healthy options? Bring your own! That way you know there will be at least one healthy dish there.



Practice Mindful Eating

It can take your brain as long as 20 minutes to register feelings of fullness. During holiday meals, take your time, eat mindfully, and truly enjoy every bite.



Load Up on Vegetables

Vegetables are packed with nutrients, low in calories, and high in fiber, which aids in keeping you satisfied for a longer time. During holiday celebrations, try to fill half of your plate with veggies and enjoy them first.



Don't skip meals

Skipping meals to save your calories for later usually backfires. Often, you end up ravenous and are more likely to overeat at dinner. Sticking to a meal schedule helps keep your blood sugar steady to prevent overeating.

HEALTHY HOLIDAY TIPS

Continued...



Drink smart

Alcoholic drinks contain empty calories that can add up quickly. So if you drink, do so in moderation. Try drinking a glass of water in between drinks, or adding sparkling water to your wine. Or enjoy a festive holiday mocktail, decaf coffee, or warm tea.



Watch your portions

There's nothing wrong with indulging in your favorite foods. Just watch your portion sizes so you don't overdo it. Try using a smaller plate. Start with a small portion, and if you really need more, you can go back for seconds.



Find healthy swaps

Consider trying a healthier version of your favorite holiday foods. For example, instead deep frying the turkey, bake it. Love cranberry sauce? Swap out the sugar for orange juice and maple syrup. Or instead of mashed potatoes, try some mashed cauliflower.



Stay Active

A simple way to counterbalance those extra holiday calories is through exercise. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days. You can involve the whole family too! Consider going for a family walk after dinner, organizing a touch football game in the backyard, or hosting a lively dance party.

HEALTHY HOLIDAY TIPS

Continued...



Say no to food pushers

Feeling pressured to eat unhealthy foods? If a friend or family member won't take no for an answer, be confident and politely decline. Stay firm and say, "No thank you" until they back off.



Watch where you stand

Try to not stand too close to the food table. If you do, it makes it easy to mindlessly munch while you chat. Fill your plate and then move across the room and visit.



Upgrade your sweets

When the holiday season rolls around, temptations are everywhere. But you can still enjoy festive treats without wrecking your health goals. Just try healthier versions that are naturally sweetened with honey, maple syrup, dates, coconut sugar, or monkfruit.



Don't shop hungry

Headed to the mall for some holiday shopping? Eat before you go. That way, hangry cravings won't hit and Cinnabon won't seem so tempting. Having snacks on hand is also a smart move. Good options include jerky, nuts, and protein bars.

Ideas for Healthful Holidays

Charcuterie Board

A holiday charcuterie board is an elegant and easy-to-make centerpiece for any party, and it can be both festive and healthy.

How to Build a Balanced Charcuterie Board:

- **Protein Options:** Include lean meats like turkey slices, smoked salmon, or plant-based proteins like hummus or nut butter.
- **Fruits and Veggies:** Add color and nutrients with fresh fruits like grapes, figs, or pomegranate seeds, along with raw or roasted veggies.
- **Cheese Choices:** Offer a variety of cheeses, like aged cheddar, goat cheese, or a light ricotta spread.
- **Whole-Grain Crackers or Nuts:** Serve alongside whole-grain crackers, toasted nuts, or even homemade granola bites for crunch.



Hostess Gift Ideas

Show your appreciation with thoughtful, healthy gifts that stand out from the typical bottle of wine.

- **Homemade Spice Mixes:** Give the gift of flavor with custom spice blends that can be used long after the holidays.
- **Gourmet Olive Oil or Vinegar:** A high-quality bottle of olive oil or balsamic vinegar makes a thoughtful and practical gift.
- **Holiday Power Bites:** Homemade power bites made with oats, nut butter, and dark chocolate are a sweet, nutritious gift.



Spice Blends

Homemade spice blends are wonderful, unique gifts for friends and family! Here are some easy spice blends to offer as hostess gifts - scale according to your mason jar size and number.

BBQ Seasoning Blend

- 4 Tbs paprika (smoked if desired)
- 4 Tbs coconut sugar
- 4 tsp garlic powder
- 4 tsp chili powder
- 2 tsp onion powder
- 2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper (optional)



Italian Herb Blend

- 2 Tbs oregano, dried
- 2 Tbs basil, dried
- 2 Tbs parsley, dried
- 3 tsp rosemary, dried
- 3 tsp thyme, dried
- 2 tsp garlic powder

Taco Seasoning Blend

- 2 Tbs chili powder
- 4 tsp cumin, ground
- 2 tsp oregano, dried
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- 2 tsp paprika, smoked (or regular)
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper (optional)



Tip: Incorporate any of these blends into a mason jar, add some holiday embellishments like ribbons, and you'll take your gift-giving to the next level!

Beverages for Healthful Holidays

Cranberry Orange Mocktail

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Total Time: 5 minutes

Yield: 1 serving

Ingredients

- 2 Tbs orange juice, freshly squeezed
- 1 tsp ginger root, grated
- 1/2 cup sparkling water
- 1/4 cup cranberry juice
- 2 Tbs ginger beer
- 1 tsp crystallized ginger
- 2 tsp sugar



Instructions

Prep

1. Squeeze orange for juice and grate fresh ginger [if you freeze the ginger ahead of time it will be easier to grate].

Make

1. Add crystallized ginger to a small food processor with sugar and process until combined. Add to a small plate.
2. Run the quartered orange around the rim of the glass and dip into the ginger/sugar mixture.
3. Add ice to the glass then add sparkling water, cranberry juice, orange juice, and ginger.
4. Top off with ginger beer. Garnish with fresh rosemary and cranberries.

Pomegranate Ginger Mocktail

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Total Time: 2 hours 5 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients

- 1 tsp ginger root, grated
- 1 lemon, sliced
- 2 cups pomegranate juice
- 4 cloves, whole
- 4 cups sparkling water
- 4 sprigs mint leaves
- 1/4 cup pomegranate seeds



Instructions

Prep

1. Grate ginger & slice lemon.

Make

1. Place pomegranate juice, two lemon slices, ginger, and cloves in a glass jar and refrigerate for at least 2 hours to infuse.
2. Strain the mixture into a fresh glass jar.
3. Fill 4 glasses with ice and pour equal amounts of strained juice into each serving glass and top with sparkling water. Stir gently.
4. Add lemon slices, pomegranate seeds, and mint sprig just before serving.

Recipes for Healthful Holidays

Pumpkin Bean Dip

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Total Time: 20 minutes

Yield: 6 servings

Ingredients

- 1/2 lemon, juiced and zested
- 2 Tbs tahini
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 1/2 cups white beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 Tbs olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups pumpkin purée
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp sage, fresh, chopped
- 2 Tbs pumpkin seeds

Instructions

Prep

1. Zest and juice lemon.
2. Drain and rinse beans.

Make

1. Place the lemon juice, lemon zest, tahini, garlic, white beans, olive oil, pumpkin puree, cayenne pepper, salt, and sage in a food processor. Pulse until smooth adding some water to thin if necessary.
2. Transfer to a bowl and allow to sit for 15 minutes before garnishing with pumpkin seeds and serving.
3. Serve with raw vegetables.



Shaved Brussels Sprouts Salad

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Total Time: 20 minutes

Yield: 6 servings

Ingredients

Salad

- 2 lb Brussels sprouts, shaved
- 2 pears, chopped
- 1 cup pomegranate arils (1 small pomegranate)
- 1/3 cup pecans, raw, roughly chopped

Dressing

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup tahini
- 1 lemon, juiced (for 1/2 Tbs juice)
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp maple syrup
- 2 Tbs cold water
- salt, to taste
- black pepper, to taste

Instructions

Prep

1. Using a food processor, shave the Brussels sprouts.
2. Seed the pomegranate (if necessary).
3. Roughly chop the pecans.
4. Chop the pears.

Make

1. Combine the shaved Brussels sprouts, pears, pomegranates, and pecans in a bowl.
2. To make the dressing, combine all ingredients in a mason jar and shake to emulsify. If necessary add more water to thin the dressing. Season to taste with salt.
3. When ready to serve the salad, drizzle the dressing over the salad ingredients and toss to combine.



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