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Take a Health Vacation For The Rest of the Year?

Enjoy your favourite holiday fun foods & focus on your health in the New Year

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

As a dietitian throughout the month of December I often get requests on how to make holiday foods healthier and eat less of the traditional goodies such as shortbread, gingerbread and other holiday favorites.

Simply put I don't think you need to change anything. Don't worry about altering your families buttery mashed potato recipe. Don't deprive yourself of your grandmothers famous chocolate holiday squares or glasses of eggnog. There are only a few days left of the holiday season and time to refocus on your health in the New Year.

Here are some other things to consider:

1. There are no bad foods, just bad diets

Choose not to define your foods as good or bad. At the end of the day food is simply a mix of carbohydrate, protein, fat, fibre, vitamins and minerals. If your diet as a whole looks good over the long term this is far more relevant than if every food choice is perfect. It is not what you do between Christmas and New Year's that is important it is between New Year's and Christmas that is most relevant.

2. Less is always more (when you choose to savor and enjoy foods guilt-free)

True intuitive eaters know that when it comes to eating you can eat anything you want but just need to be mindful and respectful of your body's fullness cues. As a whole our culture consumes food mindlessly without truly thinking and even enjoying it. Instead of wolfing down a dozen shortbread cookies, notice how much more satisfying they are and the fact you will need less to reach satisfaction if you sat quietly and enjoyed every bite. Pay attention to how good the food tastes and pause when you no longer taste the food as intensely to check-in if you want to continue.



3. Take lessons from small children

Small children do not have any diet knowledge about what is healthy and unhealthy. They simply eat based on taste and stop when they are full.

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Take lessons from small children that are naturally brilliant intuitive eaters (that is until adults interfere with their hunger regulation). Notice that kids may devour some of their favorite foods and leave a few bites at the end of the meal since they respect when they have had enough. Contrast that to many adults who would find it strange to leave a small amount since we are often conditioned to “finish our plate.”

4. Your body is forgiving of short-term fluctuations in your eating choices

Thank goodness our body is forgiving of our short-term food choices. Research supports that once in a while overeating significantly (and I mean really over doing it) will not have any long-term effect on your body weight. What you do for weeks and months is what really counts. Be forgiving – no one asked you to get it right every single time you eat.

If you have gained a few pounds over night it is simply scientifically impossible to have gained true body mass (fat, muscle or bone). The day-to-day small fluctuations on a scale are simply just water fluctuations. You will be heavier the day after consuming more salty foods and carbohydrate foods (sweets and starchy foods) since both of these store extra water on our body. Don't be fooled in thinking you need to skip carbs – they simply provide extra hydration.

5. Start thinking about some health goals for the New Year

The time between Christmas and New Years is often a less hectic time of year than the month of December. Take some quiet time to check-in with how you are doing on all aspects of your health (physical, emotional, spiritual, social and intellectual). Chances are you already know that goal setting is important but just how specific are the goals you are setting? Simply saying I want to eat better or exercise more or stop smoking is just not good enough. Define this further as to HOW you will do this. Some examples to get you thinking are choosing to eat fruit every day with your breakfast or walking three times per week for at least twenty minutes.

Also keep in mind a quote by Mabel Newcombe “It is more important to know where you are going than to get there quickly.”

Andrea Holwegner, known as the Chocoholic Dietitian, is founder and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc., a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a media expert for the Dietitians of Canada. For nutrition counselling information and to sign up for a free monthly newsletter loaded with nutrition tips, recipes and more visit www.healthstandnutrition.com. Twitter @chocoholicRD.

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