

## Eating Survival Guide for the Season of Gluttony

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

It is the season of shortbread cookies, eggnog and chocolate. It is also a time of year where busy schedules, stress and finding time to fit in fitness can be a struggle. Here are a few strategies to help survive the season of gluttony:

### 1. What is the best nutrition strategy for surviving the holiday season?

Keep in mind that it's not what you do between Christmas and New Year's, but what you do between New Year's and Christmas that really counts. Health should be measured by your ability to not only eat healthfully but also soulfully with fun and flexibility.

Don't be a scrooge and nitpick your favorite holiday treats and make family and friends that are celebrating traditional foods feel badly.



Overeating occasionally will never result in permanent lasting weight or health changes. The goal over the holidays is to be mindful but not obsessive.

### 2. Is it really as bad as you think?

The first thing to consider is how big of a challenge the holiday season will be for you. Over the years, I've met many people who are stressed about "blowing their diet" over the holidays when it really wasn't that big of a deal. I've also met clients that don't expect the holidays will be challenging but find themselves overeating and overindulging for over a month of the holiday season.

To assess this take a calendar and "X" off the days you are likely to overeat or enjoy special holiday treats. For example, you may start by placing an "X" on Dec. 24, 25 and 26, as well as New Year's Eve, New Year's Day and days with any holiday parties you know you will be attending.

For many people, there isn't a huge list of X's on their calendar. For others even listing the number of holiday functions and parties you will be attending may result in a calendar full of X's. If this is the case, try to make healthier choices on other days in the month that do not have an "X" placed beside it and build a "Have-to-Have Holiday List."





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### 3. What is a “Have-to-Have Holiday List” and how might this help?

Have-to-have holiday lists are “non-negotiable” indulgent foods (those that are your favorites or are unique to a social gathering). Be choosy and go for what you really love. Give up others that are eaten mindlessly or are just simply chosen for convenience or offered at the holidays and you really don’t appreciate them. When you are eating a delightful food, savor every bite guilt-free. When you eat this way less always becomes more.

Many of my clients think about the holidays and start creating a mental list of “foods to avoid” or “foods that are bad.” Instead make your list positive. Think about which of the rich and decadent holiday foods and meals would make it to the top of the list. There is a distinct level of satisfaction when you allow yourself to indulge and truly enjoy every bite of your favorite holiday foods.

At the top of my list you will find my mom’s homemade shortbread cookies, gingerbread men and of course chocolate (after all I am the chocoholic nutritionist). I will likely enjoy rum and eggnog and since it will likely be once or twice over the holidays, the fact that it has over 300 calories per cup doesn’t matter.

### 4. What is the best way to manage holiday parties?

Firstly, if you have only a few holiday parties it may not be a big deal to “manage” holiday parties and instead make this function as a whole part of your “have-to-have holiday lists.”

For those that are attending multiple client functions, family and friend gatherings, be selective.

- Before going out to a party, have a nutritious nibble or small snack so you don't arrive ravenous. Try some toast and peanut butter, or yogurt and banana.
- Think about your “have-to-have holiday list” and give yourself permission to enjoy the best the party has to offer.
- When you are at the party, distance yourself from the food table and remember to mingle more than you munch.
- Use small plates and bowls to help "fill up our eyes" since studies show the bigger the plate/bowl the more we will eat.
- Think about what you drink: drink plenty of water and tea throughout the holidays. When you are dehydrated it may trigger you to overeat since often your body gets signals of thirst mixed up with hunger. Alcoholic beverages can also add up to be many "empty calories" [high in calories with low nutritional value]. Between drinks containing alcohol, try a low-calorie beverage such as sparkling mineral water or club soda with a splash of cranberry juice.

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## 5. What are some healthy holiday appetizer ideas?

- On a toothpick, thread a grape/cherry tomato with mini bocconcini cheese balls and a piece of fresh basil. Drizzle with a splash of balsamic vinegar.
- Slice a small zucchini(s) into 3/4 inch slices and using a melon baller scoop out a small amount of the zucchini to make room for a halved cherry tomato and a sprinkle of blue cheese (or your favorite strong cheese). Bake in the oven until cheese melted and zucchini is soft.
- Whole grain crackers spread with light cream cheese and red and/or green hot pepper jelly.
- Red and green veggie and dip platter: cherry tomatoes, red pepper slices, cucumber slices, broccolli and snap peas.

## 6. Where can I find out more information about nutrition, nutrition counselling and healthy recipes?

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*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](http://www.healthstandnutrition.com). Twitter @chocoholicRD.*

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