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Holiday Eating Strategies

(Harrisonville MO) - Food, food everywhere you turn there's food! "To avoid over indulging, you'll need some proven tips to reduce the potential for the average holiday season weight gain of five pounds," says Susan Mills-Gray, Nutrition/Health Specialist with University of Missouri Extension. "For years, people have been told to drink lots of water before going to a holiday event, but honestly that just doesn't work for most of us," she added. These updated tips have brought success for many as the holiday feasts pile up in the weeks to come!

- Be realistic – don't focus on losing weight during the holidays. Focus on maintaining your current weight. You can get back on track with weight loss when the diet danger zones of November and December have passed. Also, don't let yourself justify binge eating over the holidays, because you anticipate restricting food after January 1. Plan in advance to eat a little more when you face holiday temptations. This way you can enjoy treats more often and you'll be less likely to binge.
- Don't go to a holiday event hungry. We eat more and faster when we're hungry. Eat healthy throughout the day to keep glucose levels stable and to boost metabolism, this will work to reduce hunger for an evening event. Choose a high protein snack before an event, for example: an apple with peanut butter, yogurt, unsalted almonds or walnuts, hardboiled egg, or nonfat mozzarella cheese.
- Watch your portion. Treat yourself to a nice drink, sweets or creamy dips without guilt, but keep portion sizes under control. This is a great way to sample different foods. Commit to "small plate – no piling".
- Survey party buffets before filling plate. Decide what you're going to eat in advance, and make only one trip to the buffet. Fill small plate with ½ vegetables, ¼ lean meat and ¼ starches.

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- Avoid recreational eating. It takes about 30 minutes for the message to get from the stomach to the brain that it's full. During this time you can pile on the calories through "social eating" – food is there and everyone else is eating. Enjoy your choices and then wait at least 30 minutes before deciding if you would like a bit more.
- Make sure whatever you're offered is splurge-worthy. We all have some favorites that we look forward to during this time of year. Why waste calories on foods you can have anytime (chips, salted mixed nuts, dip, etc)? Try rating food options on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 is best) and have a bit more of the foods that are truly special and unique to the season.
- Make a conscious choice to limit high fat items. If it's creamy, fried, or cheese-filled, it's going to be loaded with calories. Commit to tasting portions. Low fat, high fiber foods allow you to eat a larger amount for fewer calories and not feel deprived.
- Use strongly intense mints, gums and strips. These dull the taste buds and also trigger satiety messages to the brain. So use one upon arrival and others when you find yourself wanting to nibble.
- Choose alcoholic beverages wisely. Alcohol is high in calories – liquors, sweet wines and sweet mixed drinks may contain up to 450 calories per 6 ounces! Alcohol can lessen inhibitions and induce overeating; also, calories from alcohol tend to be stored in the abdomen. If you choose to drink, select light wines and beers, and use non-alcoholic mixers such as water and diet soda. Also ask for your drink in a tall slender glass, you actually receive less while giving the illusion of more!
- Go easy on eggnog and punch. Many holiday beverages are packed with calories. Choose calorie free water or diet sodas to help fill your stomach and keep you hydrated.
- Maintain perspective. Overeating one day won't make or break your eating plan. And it certainly won't make you gain weight. It takes days and days of overeating to gain weight. If you do overindulge, don't just give up. Plan to get back on track the next day. There are going to be a few bumps on the road to healthier eating and we have to acknowledge this to avoid guilt and despair.

For more information contact your local University of Missouri Extension Center or this faculty member directly at mills-grays@missouri.edu.

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