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Holiday Eating: Party Hearty Without Putting on the Pounds!

By Marsha J. Hudnall, MS, RD, CD

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The holidays are definitely a special time of year. These days, however, many women wonder whether "special" means happy -- or stressful. Do you know anyone who doesn't feel more stress during the holiday season? One thing is for sure: Stress is a six-letter word that can spell added trouble for many women who struggle with food, eating and weight.

A national survey of women conducted earlier this year revealed that women see stress and lack of energy as two of their top health issues. But here's where it gets interesting: Women were twice as likely as men to snack as a way of dealing with stress!

So how do you enjoy the famous holiday party time that seems to start with coffee breaks at work or weekend brunches and last through dessert parties late in the evening without overdoing on all those wonderful foods? Here's a list of ideas to consider that can help reduce holiday stress, boost energy and maximize your ability to make smart choices to support you in your efforts to feel well and stay healthy.

Keep It Simple

The absolute first "must" for enjoying your holidays is to keep it simple. Be realistic in what you want to accomplish...and what you expect others to accomplish, too. Discuss holiday plans with family and friends. Consider paring down your "to do" list, and get a commitment from others to share in the extra holiday tasks that create extra fun for everyone.

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Feed Yourself Well

A party later in the evening doesn't mean skimping on food during the day. All that will do is set you up for overeating because you get too hungry. Instead, eat regular, balanced meals and snacks that include grains/starchy vegetables, protein foods and fruits and/or vegetables every 3–5 hours when you are hungry, and stopping when you are satisfied.

Likewise, if you overdo it at one meal or party (and who doesn't on occasion?), don't try to "make up" for it at your next meals. Go back to your regular eating plan as described above.

Dance the Night Away!

Physical activity may provide the biggest boost to your ability to cope during the holidays. Not only is it a natural outlet for tension (and consequently another way to cope), physical activity boosts our energy level and our motivation to keep going.

Be creative! Break out of your mold by adding the opportunities of the holiday season, such as dancing, skating, sledding, skiing, snowshoeing, caroling (all that walking)...even trimming the tree

(there's a lot of stretching there). Make fun physical activity the primary focus of your parties, instead of depending on the food to make or break it.

Realistically, many people find that physical activity early in the day is the best way to make it happen. A walk after breakfast is one of the best strategies for boosting energy and helping you feel well the rest of the day. Don't forget those walks around the shopping mall or the long brisk walk in from the parking lot count for something, too! (See FitBriefing Moving for Life).

Put on Parties that Work for You

This is where stress can send you straight for the Christmas cookies or Hanukkah chocolate. First, plan parties where you get help. How about just being responsible for the "centerpiece" dish, such as a main dish, beautiful salad or dessert, and let the supermarket, bakery, and/or deli do the rest. Or if you don't already have a pot luck tradition for family gatherings, now is the time to start!

What will be on the menu? A simple, healthy meal with some added festive touches will not only impress your guests, but it will truly be enjoyed by all – especially you! Many holiday menus start with roast turkey. Roasting a turkey or turkey breast is relatively simple, but most grocery and/or meat markets will roast it for you. Serve it with Brown Rice Pilaf or Wild Rice Pilaf (both recipes from the new edition of Green Mountain's cookbook Recipes for Living). Add dried cherries or cranberries, chopped toasted pecans and chopped fresh parsley for a festive touch. A colorful tossed green salad could be as simple as a bag of mixed field greens with orange segments and red onion rings. Garnish with a slice of herbed chevre (goat cheese). Serve with Honey–Balsamic Vinaigrette (another Green Mountain favorite). Take advantage of the sweets and other treats of the season that your local bakery will surely be making; order a tray of assorted cookies, for example. Serve with a scoop of raspberry, lemon or tropical fruit sorbet in holiday dishes. Or if you want a real "wow" but simple dessert, try Marinated

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Strawberries in Phyllo cups.

Make Yourself a Priority

This is the bottom line for holidays that you really enjoy. Remember, if you take care of yourself first, then you're much better equipped to take care of everyone else. But women just don't tend to do that. A survey last month of 1000 women revealed that while almost all women would enjoy doing something for themselves like taking a walk or an aromatic bath, most spend less than 30 minutes a day nurturing themselves...and almost 10 hours a day caring for others! Clearly, we're out of balance here. Now there's a great gift – the gift of more time for you!

No More New Year's Resolutions to Lose Weight!

The staff at Green Mountain at Fox Run wishes you the happiest, healthiest holiday season ever. Our other wish for you is that you approach the New Year not with another resolution to take off pounds gained during the holiday season. Instead, we wish that you enjoy the season without thinking about body size, instead caring for yourself in a way that allows you to go through the season feeling vibrant and well. The truth is that most of us may put on a pound or two during the holidays when wonderful foods abound. But if we're tuned in to feeling well, and supporting our bodies with sensible enjoyable eating, regular physical activity, stress management and positive thinking, those extra pounds won't be permanent. With this lifestyle in place, we'll find our weight returns to its natural, healthy place once the abundance of the holidays subsides.

©2004 Green Mountain at Fox Run, Ludlow, Vermont. Marsha J. Hudnall, MS, RD is director of communications and senior nutritionist. For over 32 years, Green Mountain at Fox Run has developed and refined a life-changing program of permanent weight loss through lifestyle change, exclusively for women (<http://www.fitwoman.com.com/weightlossprogram.htm>). To learn more about Green Mountain at Fox Run, visit us at: <http://www.fitwoman.com>

Survival Guide For Holiday Parties

By Kim Beardsmore

If you have been watching your weight all year, you certainly won't want to add back the pounds during the holiday season! By making a commitment to yourself and your health, with these tips it will be possible to enjoy the holiday celebrations without adding extra pounds.

1. Don't think diet, rather think about eating smarter.
2. Before attending a party, have a small high quality, nutritionally balanced meal. That way you will be less likely to be hungry and fill up on snack foods served with drinks.
3. While at a party, determine to hold your drink in your dominant hand all evening. This will make it a little less convenient to reach for food.

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4. Think of one daily indulgence, rather than a 'day of indulgence'.
5. Before attending a party resolve to snack only from fresh fruit and vegetable choices.
6. If you must have a taste of chips and other 'dry' snack foods, alternate with fresh vegetable crudité's. It is quite difficult to mix the tastes, so you are likely to eat more slowly and eventually give up. When that happens stick to the fresh food choices.
7. Choose between an alcoholic beverage, a dessert or a 'sinful' main course, rather than indulging in all three. Rotate your choice when you have several events to attend.
8. Choose almonds, pecans and walnuts, eating individually and slowly. This way you can avoid handfuls of salted peanuts or cashews.
9. Alternate alcoholic drinks with a glass of sparkling mineral water with a dash of lime, or a vegetable juice dashed with a chili sauce.

(c) Kim Beardsmore

Kim is a successful weight loss coach who will cut through the diet-hype and help you reach your goal weight. No public 'weigh-ins', meetings that cost you money or fads...simply results you will love! You can receive a free consultation. Visit today:

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