Staying Healthy and Fit Over the Holidays

Many people have good intentions of eating healthy and staying in shape over the holiday season, but end up overindulging in once-a-year delicacies and skipping regular workout sessions. Staying healthy during this time of year doesn't have to mean giving up your favorite holiday treats, but instead learning how to control yourself around them.

April Kneifel, a registered dietitian at Curves International, Inc., says it isn’t always what you eat, but how much of it that can keep you from staying healthy over the holidays.

“It really just comes down to being sensible about your portions,” says Kneifel. “An easy way to reduce your portion sizes is to use a smaller plate. If there is less room on the plate, you’ll be eating less food overall.”

Kneifel says to eat slowly and enjoy the company of others while dining, which will give you something else to focus on besides food.

“Avoid going back for seconds,” Kneifel says. “Chances are you’ll feel like a stuffed turkey if you do!”

Kneifel also suggests eating healthy snacks such as granola bars, almonds, and fruit while traveling or doing holiday shopping.

“Packing snacks is a great way to minimize eating out and over-eating later,” Kneifel says.

In order to keep yourself from overindulging in unhealthy foods at home, Rose Giordano, a Nutrition instructor for South University Online Programs, recommends not keeping foods in the house that you know you can’t avoid.

Giordano says you can also modify many of your favorite recipes to cut calories.

From office parties to family gatherings, the holiday season is filled with social events.

“Sometimes it involves using less oil or sugar in a cake mix and replacing it with egg whites,” Giordano says. “Other ways to sneak in a calorie deficit would be to use lower fat milk and cheese products instead of whole milk. Just be careful of fat-free ingredients. Those typically have an aftertaste that can alter a recipe a little too much and result in some unsavory treats.”

Although it’s best to try and stick to a healthy diet as much as you can, both Kneifel and Giordano agree that it’s perfectly acceptable to indulge in your favorites, as long as you do so in moderation.

“That means, just one or two cookies instead of a whole pack,” Giordano says. “As long as you have a good estimate of how many calories you are consuming, all your favorite foods can be a part of your diet.”

Eating Healthy at Holiday Parties

“The easiest way to keep your cravings under control is to eat before heading to the party,” Giordano says. “With a full stomach, you’ll feel less likely to binge. Alternatively, head toward carrot sticks or other veggie platters. This way, you’re still blending in with having food on your plate without the threat of ruining your diet. Just go easy on the dip.”

Giordano says to avoid anything greasy or fried, as these are likely the unhealthiest options you could choose.

“If it leaves an oil stain behind, then it’s not likely a healthy choice” Giordano says. “Also, be leery of any food covered in sauces. Sauces or gravy often are made with oil and other fats. These are often referred to as ‘hidden’ fats and can be diet busters.”
If you’re assigned to bring a dish to the party, Giordano recommends choosing something that will keep you eating healthy.

“The traditional fruit and veggie platter is always a favorite,” Giordano says. “However, more people are getting hip to hummus dip and whole wheat crackers. With all the different flavors and spices, there is bound to be a version that will be a crowd pleaser.”

**Staying Healthy During the Holidays**

Kneifel says that people typically eat more during the holiday season, which is one reason why weight gain during this time of year is common.

“We celebrate the holidays using food,” Kneifel says. “This makes it so easy to gain weight this time of year. We are constantly surrounded by food during this time of year. If it’s not grandma’s to-die for pumpkin pie, then it’s your aunt’s infamous green bean casserole!”

Kneifel says that people also tend to exercise less during the holiday season.

“From office parties to family gatherings, the holiday season is filled with social events,” Kneifel says. “We are either busy preparing for them or attending them.”

Katie Mitchell, director of exercise and research at Curves International, Inc., says in addition to having busy schedules over the holidays that keep people from working out, many also don’t like to go outside and brave the cold.

“During cold, winter months, it’s hard to stay motivated to exercise outdoors,” Mitchell says. “Cold, dreary weather even makes it hard to make it to a gym and exercise indoors! Instead everyone wants to stay snuggled in at home with hot chocolate.”

**Holiday Fitness Tips**

Mitchell says that although cold weather can deter people from exercising, the main reason for a decline in physical activity is time.

Although it can be difficult to find the time to fit exercise into a busy day, Mitchell says it is necessary to do so.

“When we have a goal of weight loss in mind, or even weight maintenance, it’s important to stick to the commitment we made and make time for exercise, even during busy holiday months,” Mitchell says. “Instead of avoiding physical activity because family is in town, bring them with you!”

Kneifel’s family-friendly fitness tips include activities such as taking a walk together, building a snowman, holding a kickball or softball tournament, or walking your pet as great ways to stay in shape and have fun with your relatives at the same time.

Mitchell’s fitness tips include activities that families can do together indoors.

“Many families gather around the TV during the holidays, well, during each commercial break, walk around the house, or do standing squats, [or] maybe even some jumping jacks,” Mitchell says. “This will also help avoid the walk to the kitchen for another snack.”

Mitchell points out that many chores can also double as a workout. She says that activities such as bringing in wood for the fireplace and cleaning the house can help you to burn a few calories.

“With all of the parties, there are bound to be a lot of messes to clean up,” Mitchell says. “Rather than dreading house chores, get excited knowing you are burning more calories!”