

12 Secrets to Avoid Gaining Weight During the Holidays



The average US adult gains 6 lbs from Thanksgiving to New Years. It takes until July for many to lose the extra weight. Often they never return to their pre-holiday weight. The holidays seem to roll around faster every year, and most people still end up frazzled by obligations and preparations. From overeating at parties to stress-eating while wrapping presents late at night, it is important to avoid starting the New Year heavier than before. Here are some tips to help avoid weight gain while still enjoying a happy, healthy holiday season.

Things to Do Before the Party or Big Dinner

1. **Stay hydrated.** While dashing to and from events, it can be easy to forget to drink enough water. Drinking water can also help control calories. Foods with a high water content, such as fruits and vegetables, are absorbed more slowly by the body, aiding fullness. Carry a bottle of water with you, if that is not your habit, especially in your car.
2. **Don't go to a party hungry.** It can be very hard to resist a plateful of hors d'oeuvres or buffet of buttery desserts if attending a party on an empty stomach. Eating a small, nutritious meal or even snack prior to attending an event eases hunger while allowing for a small, reasonable indulgence later.
3. **Get adequate sleep.** While late nights make it hard to stick to a regular sleep schedule, sleep deprivation can cause not only drowsiness the following day, but also lead to overeating. A study by the Mayo Clinic found that men and women who slept less than 5 hours a night were more likely to crave (and end up eating) more high-calorie foods, especially rewarding sweets.
4. **Wear fitted clothes. Sounds silly, but it really works!** Before sitting down to a big dinner or going to a party consider clothing options. An elastic waistband is much more forgiving than a belt and structured pants or jeans. The tightening waist as you eat can save you tons of calories.
5. **Carry around some snacks.** This avoids stopping at fast food windows or arriving at the party hungry. Grab-and-go fruit like apples and small bags of popped popcorn, carrots and light string cheese are options. Better yet, have a high protein bar, cheese bar or small bag of Quest chips. Many of these choices are high in protein and do not melt in a car.

LAST CHANCE BEFORE THE EVENT:

6. **Guzzle a big glass of water as you drive to the party.** It takes up space in your stomach, so there's literally less room for food. And it really works: When subjects in one British [study](#) drank 16 ounces of water 30 minutes before mealtime, they reported feeling fuller than those who skipped the water.

Things to Do At the Party or Big Dinner

7. Think small plates. If you have the option to serve yourself on a salad plate instead of a dinner plate, do it. Less space means you'll automatically pile on less food—as much as 45 percent less, according to some [findings](#). And less food means less of a chance to come away from your meal feeling stuffed and bloated.

8. Have a 20 minute pause-before-seconds rule. Instead of filling up your plate right away, wait at least 20 minutes. It takes about that long for partially digested food to reach the small intestine and trigger the release of hormones that signal feelings of fullness. If you still want more after taking a break, go ahead and help yourself. But by that time, you just might find that you're satisfied after all.

9. Start each meal with a soup or salad. Holiday foods tend to be richer and heavier than normal meals, which can lead to excessive caloric intake. Like the gulp of water trick, start the meal with filling, low calorie foods. By starting with a broth-based soup (not cream) or a salad (minus heavy dressing), it is easier to eat a smaller portion of the high calorie foods without going hungry. Minestrone, vegetable soups, and chicken noodle are healthy options.

10. Hold off on alcohol until you have eaten something. Alcohol lowers your inhibition and control levels, especially when you drink on an empty stomach. What's more, [emerging research](#) suggests that it also blocks chemical signals in the brain that regulate fullness—making it hard to know when you've had enough. The secret is to have some food (or even a small snack) before the first drink. Food will slow the absorption of alcohol, so you'll be able to think clearer.

Drink smarter. Since *cutting out alcohol* is not realistic for most people during the holiday season, *limiting intake* is crucial for moderating calories. Here are the secrets:

1. The first drink should be a sparkling glass of Pellegrino or Perrier with some lime to avoid drinking alcohol because you are actually thirsty.
2. Alternating each drink with a glass of water helps avoid over-indulging.
3. Avoid drinks with high sugar like margaritas, vodka and tonic or vodka and cranberry juice. These mixes can easily double or triple the calories. Harvard researchers explain that most cocktails contain simple carbohydrates, which cause a spike in blood sugar, the “crash” after leads to a ravenous appetite and in the holiday setting a high likelihood to over-eat and drink even more.
4. Avoid drinking "shots", instead dilute the alcohol with soda water, diet tonic, diet soda. This makes the drink look larger and provides something in your hand.
5. Avoid the common plan to avoid eating all day and “save up calories” for drinking later on, it is wiser to plan to have less to drink and eat food as normal throughout the day. On an empty stomach you will simply drink more and then ending up eating more.

INDULGE A LITTLE: Deprivation of favorite holiday-only treats can lead to an unplanned binge, especially when stress levels are elevated. Treat yourself a bit during the festive season, always following the rule of moderation.