

# Holiday eating after bariatric surgery

Here are five strategies I like to recommend to my patients:

## 1. Allow yourself to indulge, but in moderation.

Having weight-loss surgery doesn't mean that your favorite holiday foods are now off-limits. It just means that you need to rethink your approach to how you'll enjoy them.

Unless you're newly post-operative, it's OK to enjoy small portions of the foods you love most. If there's a dish or dessert you look forward to every year, you can savor 2 or 3 bites, especially as part of a balanced, portion-controlled meal. If you're unsure whether something is acceptable, it is better off to stay away.

I encourage patients to experiment with making traditional recipes lighter, too. For instance, try blending ripe bananas, skim milk, nonfat yogurt, rum extract, and freshly grated nutmeg to enjoy a creamy, flavorful eggnog-like drink that has only a fraction of the fat.

## 2. Stick with the healthy eating basics.

Most people define the holidays as the stretch between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. There are special days, parties, and gatherings scattered throughout. But most of the days in that time frame are still normal, and I encourage my patients to treat them that way.

Keeping up with your usual healthy habits helps you maintain a solid foundation and feel your best. It's important to eat regular meals and avoid skipping meals in an attempt to “save” calories for treats. That can make it easy to overeat at special events.

Like always, keep putting protein first and be aware of your portion sizes. Eat slowly so you can pay attention to your body's fullness cues, and continue tracking your food intake so you understand how much you're eating.

Make sure exercising remains a high priority, too. Not only can physical activity help you maintain your weight, it can help you cope with holiday stress. Even at holiday gatherings, you can invite friends and family to take a relaxing post-meal walk.

## 3. Head to holiday events with a plan.

Walking into a party or gathering that has foods that don't fit your everyday diet can be overwhelming – especially when everyone around you is enjoying all the tasty fare. Strategizing ahead of time can give you a sense of control and reduce the chances for

making spur-of-the-moment food decisions that might leave you feeling uncomfortable later.

I encourage my patients to prepare for holiday events with these steps:

- Eat some protein beforehand to keep your hunger in check.
- Keep healthy snacks in the car in case you need them.
- Think through your food options before filling your plate.
- Fill your plate just once to keep your portions in check.
- Grab a plate or glass of water early on to avoid socializing empty-handed. People will be less likely to try to serve you something if you already have food or a drink.
- Identify a “safe” person you can talk to if you need a distraction from tempting foods.
- Don't bring leftovers home.

4. Remember: You have the power to say no, but it might take some practice.

We've all run into a family member or friend at a holiday gathering whose main mission seems to be encouraging others to eat, eat, eat. Though this is a well-intentioned gesture, I remind my patients that their job is to choose foods that will help them feel their best - not to eat to make others happy.

You don't owe others anything more than a simple, “No, thanks!” But if you're worried about offending someone or causing a conflict, you can always stall and tell them you'll try some later.

5. Be kind to yourself.

It is a common misconception that bariatric surgery prevents you from overeating. It's possible to overeat after any bariatric surgery – especially if it has been awhile since the surgery – and overindulging may lead to vomiting, diarrhea and overall discomfort. An isolated case of overeating will not lead to a failure of your surgery.

If you overindulge, don't panic. While it's important to stick with your healthy eating habits as much as possible, it's also worth keeping in mind that everyone eats too much from time to time (especially during the holidays).

Remember...your weight gain – and subsequent weight loss – didn't happen overnight. What happens at one holiday event won't instantly change your body, and one slip-up shouldn't send you into a guilty spiral.

Instead of dwelling on what you should or shouldn't have done, start the day fresh by resolving to get back to your healthy habits. Returning to your usual routine will help you feel better both emotionally and physically, putting you in a better position for managing the next holiday eating event.