Holiday Survival Guide: How to Get Through the Holidays with No Regrets

Let’s face it: it is hard to stick to a healthy eating and exercise plan during the holidays. Everywhere we turn there are tempting foods and drinks—from treats at office parties to our own traditional family favorites. When you add in a busy schedule filled with shopping and get-togethers that make it tough to squeeze in exercise, you have a recipe for disaster as far as our scales are concerned.

The good news is that you really can get through the holidays without gaining weight. It will take some effort, but you will thank yourself a thousand times when January 1st rolls around and you have no regrets!

Your Goal: Maintenance
In order to greet the New Year without tipping the scale, it is wise to try to maintain your weight during the next few weeks instead of trying to lose.

Remember: you want to enjoy the holidays, not be miserable from deprivation. This means that you will allow yourself occasional treats and splurges and keep the scale where it is rather than trying to actually decrease your weight.

There are several ways to accomplish this:

Strategy #1: Start with a Salad
If possible leave the cheese, croutons, bacon, egg yolks and nuts/seeds off to the side or add very minimal amounts as these items can load up the calories and fat!

Have your salad dressing on the side, (vinaigrette or olive oil & balsamic vinegar) so you can dip your fork in the dressing rather than pour it on the salad.

Tip: Dip your fork in the dressing, stab your salad and enjoy far less calories. Remember, you need just enough dressing to taste not drown in.
*Olive oil increases resting energy expenditure, vinegar up regulates genes for fat metabolism. (ref:1,2)

References

Strategy #2: Feast On Protein
So you’re scoping out the buffet set-up at a holiday party and you’re contemplating what to eat. I’m betting there’s a turkey there. Or a ham. Or some shrimp cocktail. Eat it, and only that, until you’re full.
Protein is, by nature, very filling. And by filling up on lean protein, you’ll avoid other, potentially more destructive food items at the buffet.
And best yet, you still leave satisfied.
Another benefit of protein is that it also helps your body process carbohydrates more effectively by stimulating the release of the hormone glucagon—a hormone which helps to control blood sugar and curb the fat-storage properties of insulin.
So if you do indeed add some carbs, they’ll become much less of a threat to your waistline.

Strategy #3: Do NOT Drink Calories
Calories in beverages are wasted calories. They do nothing to increase satiety or fullness, and can very easily tack on a serious amount of caloric damage to any evening.
If it has calories, don’t drink it, plain and simple.
If you’d like some variety beyond plain water, go with a flavored water or other diet beverage.
Just please, do NOT fall victim to 500 calories of fat-storing high fructose corn syrup. Simple avoidance, great benefit.

Strategy #4: Know Your First Move
While we’re on the topic of beverages, here’s a great tip to go into any holiday party with.
As soon as you arrive, before you do anything else, pour yourself a big glass of water, drink it down, and wait 15 minutes before eating anything. Mingle with the crowd, say hello, etc.
This is a simple, extremely effective way to curb your appetite and give yourself a sense of fullness before heading to the dinner line and is sure to make a difference in the amount of food you end up adding to your plate.

**Strategy #5: Be Hospitable**

Many times the parties we attend throughout the holidays are “potluck” buffet style where each person is responsible for bringing their own dish to contribute to the menu. If you’ve ever worked in an office, you know what I’m talking about. This is a great opportunity for you to contribute something healthy to the table, and in turn make it extremely easy for you to make a healthy choice. Simply eat your own meal. This way you KNOW exactly what’s in it and how it was prepared, a huge plus (i.e. everything that looks healthy isn’t necessarily so).

And even if the party isn’t potluck, bring something to contribute anyway. I haven’t met a host yet that doesn’t appreciate help from others when it comes to feeding the guests.

**Strategy #6: Arrive “Full”**

I’m sure you’ve heard the recommendation that you never go to the grocery store hungry as you’ll just end up buying everything in sight, spending way too much money, and making a bunch of unhealthy choices because everything looks “so good”. Well, I’m going to give the same suggestion for holiday parties. Instead of showing up with your stomach growling and mouth salivating, take action to ensure you arrive in the exact opposite position. How? Easy. Eat a BIG, healthy meal just prior to heading to the party.

In fact, I can remember one time when I actually stopped at Subway on the way to a party and sat down to a huge bowl of leafy greens, grilled chicken, and veggies. When I arrived at the party full, all of a sudden all those desserts didn’t look nearly as appetizing.

Easy, super effective way to avoid falling into temptation.
Strategy #7: Be “Normal”
This one goes right along with the previous tip. In an effort to avoid the “damage” of a big meal or party, most people don’t eat anything else all day leading up to the big event in order to “save up” the calories.
Big mistake, and for several reasons.
First, when you go into a meal or party incredibly hungry, you will absolutely overeat to a much higher degree than you would otherwise.
Bigger portions of calorie dense, fatty/carb-laden food = WAY more calories than you would have naturally eaten throughout the day.
Secondly, eating nothing only to follow it up with a big, high-fat/high-carb/high-calorie meal leads to a greater percentage of those calories than normal to be stored as fat.
Don’t shoot yourself in the foot by starving yourself all day. Eat as you normally would and then hit up the party.

Strategy #8: Go Non-Alcoholic
Don’t get me wrong, I like to have a few beers or a glass of wine from time to time, so I’m not going to tell you to completely give up alcohol through-out the holidays.
But, what I will suggest is that the majority of your beverages at holiday get-togethers be of the non-alcoholic variety.
Simply put, alcoholic beverages are perhaps the easiest way to add unnecessary calories to your daily total, and unfortunately, it doesn’t end with just the calorie total.
Excessive alcohol intake also creates a hormonal environment in the body very conducive to fat storage, making those calories much more likely to negatively impact the number that shows next time you step on the scale.
So, what’s “excessive” or “how much is too much”. Well, I think we all know that. If you’re regularly getting “tipsy” or drinking to the point of intoxication, then you’re physique is going to take a hit for it.
Enjoy a (non-sugary) drink or two when appropriate, but stick with non-calorie beverages otherwise.

**Strategy #9: Modify Your Plate**
Sometimes you just want to enjoy what’s there without having to be picky, choosey, or limit your selections. If that’s the case, here’s a tip that will absolutely keep you from overdoing it while keeping your calorie intake in check:
Use dessert sized plates.
Yep, just go ahead and grab a plate from the dessert line and then head over to the “dinner” line. Controlling portion size just happens to be one of the best ways you can regulate calorie intake without necessarily giving up your favorite foods.
Smaller plate = smaller portions, and with smaller portions come fewer calories across the board.
As an added benefit, research has shown that people tend to overeat and eat beyond the point of “fullness” when large portions are in front of them. With the smaller plate option, you’ll likely be very content when you finish without “mindlessly” continuing to stuff yourself just because the food is there in front of you.

**Strategy #10: If You Don’t Love It, Don’t Eat It**
Learning to be selective will prove to be a highly-helpful skill when approaching holiday meals, parties, and buffet lines. Simply put, you don’t need to eat everything that’s there. If we’re being completely honest, we probably don’t even really like everything that we toss on our plate and instead just include it because it’s available.
So, here’s another valuable suggestion: If you don’t absolutely love it, don’t eat it. As you go through the line or as foods are passed along the table, only dish out your absolute favorites while skipping over the selections that you can probably do without.
Stock Up on the “Good Stuff”
In addition to choosing your favorites, whatever veggies are available, piling them on your plate. They’re filling, will compliment the other items on your plate, and will easily help you adhere to the next rule.

**Strategy #11: One and Done**
Here’s a realistic insight:
Most of the weight we put on during the holiday season comes from the second (and sometimes third) helping, not the first. And while it’s easy to go back in for more, a great way to cut out half the calories you’d normally eat at a holiday function is to limit yourself to only one helping.
So, go ahead and fill up your plate (remember, we’re using smaller plates), but once you’re done, you’re done.
Adhere to this one rule alone and you’ll automatically cut in half your calorie intake this holiday season.

**Strategy #12: Make the “Announcement”**
Here’s perhaps the easiest way to avoid going back for seconds.
As simple as this next one is, it works unbelievably well.
In fact, I actually did this at the dinner table the other night when out with friends, and it was easily the most comfortable social situation I’ve ever been in while sticking to my diet and moving forward to my goals.
When you arrive at a party or sit down to the table, let people know what you’ve committed to.
Something as simple as “Hey, just want to let everyone know, I’m on a mission to drop some pounds. This food looks amazing, and I plan to enjoy a full plate, but if you see me back in the buffet line, kick my butt into gear.”
People respect that and they’ll back you up.
From then on out, you never have to worry about people who “don’t know” your goals constantly offering you food, and beyond that, it’s a huge source of accountability for you.
I can guarantee that when you put this simple strategy into practice, you won’t even think of going in for seconds. It’s
extremely easy to resist once you give people “expectations” for you to live up to.

Strategy #13: Chew, Chew, Chew
Now, I’m sure you’ve heard this one before, but let me ask you this.
Do you ever really make a conscious effort to take your time between mouthfuls? Probably not.
A good rule of thumb is to chew your food at least 20 times before swallowing while giving yourself a bit of a breather between bites.
Trust me, the food will still be there.
Eating slowly and with a high chew-count gives your body time to realize it’s getting full—in the end you’ll be just as content while consuming far fewer calories.
Consciously give it a try, and I guarantee it will make a difference.

Strategy #14: Write It Down
In addition to the “announcement” tip above, another great way to establish accountability is to keep a food journal and daily exercise log.
While you may or may not be used to doing this, during times where it’s easy to go off track, keeping a journal of some sort is exceptionally helpful to keep you in check.
There’s just something about having something in writing and tracking your progress simply throughout the day that makes you that much more apt to “stick to it”.

Strategy #15: Serve Yourself “Half” First
Here’s an idea that can make the small plate method even more effective:
Serve yourself only “half” first, filling up the plate half-way and then taking time to sit, eat slowly, chew, and enjoy what’s there. Then, you have the added bonus of being able to go back for the other half!
It’s funny how simple psychology works, but even though it’s the same amount, you just feel like you’re eating more when you’re able to “go back” for more.

**Strategy #16: Choose Dessert Wisely**
Try to make 'wise' dessert choices rather than deny yourself, have a smaller portion and savor every mouthful when you have choices, opt for desserts that are lower in fat and sugar. For example, if faced with a plate of cookies, you may decide to choose the sugar cookies or gingerbread cookies over shortbread cookies as they tend to be lower in fat.

**Strategy #17: Walk It Off**
15 minutes after a meal (if possible), go for a walk with your family to see holiday displays in your neighborhood. Walk for 45 minutes at a leisurely pace (1 ½-2miles). During that 45 minute walk, consume 16oz of ice cold water.

**Strategy #19: Eat Breakfast**
People who eat breakfast consume fewer calories throughout the day than those who skip this important meal.

**Strategy #20: “Gum” Your Way to Eating Less**
Right before you walk into your holiday event, pop a piece of your favorite sugar free gum in your mouth. With all the great flavors out there, you’ll have a steady delicious flavor in your mouth to keep you from snacking on a chip here or a cookie there. When it’s time to eat your main meal that you planned for THEN go and dispose of your gum. If you think dessert will be tempting, don’t be afraid to take a new piece after dinner!

**Strategy #21: Surround Yourself with Like-Minded Individuals**
If you surround yourself with like minded and supportive people, to keep you motivated and help hold you be accountable, your fat loss goals this holiday season will be a foregone conclusion. Feel free to use the staff at MaxStrength Fitness if you need the
extra push!
If you are able to come up with a list of supportive friends or family members – You are very fortunate so take advantage of it.

**Strategy #22: Don’t Let Your Foods Touch on Your Plate**
Weird, I know — but most of the time the plate is piled so high, it’s like a giant mess of foods. This year leave "white space" between each food. Why? You’ll pile less foods on one another meaning you eat your favorites, just not as much of each.

**Strategy #23: Skip the Mindless Eating**
Avoid the snack bowls, mixed nuts, and extras that are lying around the house. These are just extra calories that fill you up.

**Strategy #24: Weigh Yourself Twice A Week**
Normally it is not a good idea to step on the scale too often, but during the holidays it’s a great way to stay on track with your goals, If you see the scale start to creep up, you can immediately take steps to correct it, such as backing off your calories for a day or two, drinking more water, and adding in more exercise.

**Strategy #25: Deal With Leftovers Quickly**
If you have unhealthy leftovers in your home, you are likely to indulge. Don’t leave them sitting around. Freeze them, give them away or toss them. It’s not worth the temptation!

**Strategy #26: Check in with Your Future-Self**
Every day, speak to yourself from the future—say from January 1st. Thank yourself for doing the tough work of self-discipline during these holiday weeks. You might say something like this: “Thank you! I feel great! I’m no heavier than I was in November, I’ve stayed on track with my exercise, my energy is incredible and I’ve got the momentum to spend the rest of the winter getting in even better shape before spring gets here!”
Strategy #27: Fill your plate (without letting foods touch) and walk away from the buffet table. Then wait 20 minutes before deciding to go up again. Again, seems obvious. But it’s not too common — walking away from the buffet table means you’ll be less likely to keep filling up on the extras just because. And waiting the 20 minutes will allow you to truly determine if you’re physiologically hungry (not likely) or psychologically hungry (more likely).

Strategy #28: Relax
Find time to breathe, slow down so you can remember the time with the ones you love. Don’t sweat the small things, that is not what the holiday season is all about.

Strategy #29: Remember the Important Things
Start a gratitude journal; there are so many things to be thankful for on a daily basis. Too often we focus on what we don’t have versus all of the wonderful things we do have. Having an attitude of gratitude improves our overall health.
“Gratitude is the forgotten factor in happiness research. Grateful people report higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism and lower levels of depression and stress. People with a strong disposition toward gratitude have the capacity to be empathetic and to take the perspective of others. They are rated as more generous and more helpful. Grateful individuals place less importance on material goods, are less likely to judge their own and others success in terms of possessions accumulated and are less envious of others.” Find a way to give to others this holiday season.

Strategy #30: Sleep!
Sleep is so important, especially this time of year. When you are traveling. If you don’t get enough sleep you the hormones that control your hunger are off as well as your chances of getting sick increase.
Strategy #31: It’s OK to Say No
With all the parties and family expectations during this time of year, it’s easy to get run down. You simply can’t do it all, so be selective when saying yes to another obligation.

Strategy #32: Intensity Trumps Time
If there is one thing you do not have enough of this time of the year it is time. But you can use this to your advantage by simply making your workouts intense.
By exercising for just 20 minutes with short burst of high intensity you stimulate your metabolism for the entire day.
If you skimp on anything this holiday season, don’t let it be your health! Stay consistent with your workouts and you will feel amazing.
Just by following a few of these tips will help you to keep off the extra holiday pounds and achieve your fat loss goals and then some!
Remember Team MaxStrength is here for you this Holiday Season and always.

Happy Holidays,

Jeff Tomaszewski
MaxStrength Fitness

Free Initial Consultation & Demo Workout
In Order to Redeem Please Call MaxStrength Fitness:

440-835-9090
2211 Crocker Rd. Suite 120, | Westlake, Ohio 44145