

10 Mindful Eating Tips to Avoid Gaining Holiday Pounds

BY PAGE LOVE, MS, RDN, CSSD, LD

Holiday ALTA team parties and social gatherings can bring challenges to your normal sports nutrition routine, especially if you are getting ready for the winter tennis season. If you're looking to enjoy the upcoming party season without packing on extra weight and compromising your game, here is a handy list of tips to help you navigate holiday eating.

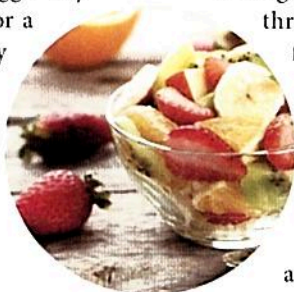


1. Eat a healthy snack beforehand.

Prior to any event where there will be lots of party food, grab an apple or a handful of baby carrots and a string cheese to fill up before you show up. This will settle your hunger and prevent you from overindulging. Arriving hungry can lead to mindlessly eating snack foods and appetizers that

will ruin the healthy diet that has gotten you to the top of your game. Plus, if you aren't hungry when you show up, you can focus your energy on socializing and spending more time with your teammates.

2. Offer to bring a healthy appetizer like a fruit salad, a veggie tray with a healthy yogurt dip or a shrimp cocktail platter. Try to avoid mayonnaise and cream-based sauces and dips. If you can, try to find out the menu ahead of time so that you can pre-plan your meal.



3. Choose a hydrating beverage to help decrease overall alcohol intake. Club soda, caffeine-free diet sodas and non-alcoholic beverages are all good choices. For those looking for a fizzy, celebratory option, my favorite easy mocktail recipe is sparkling grape juice (or any non-alcoholic champagne alternative) mixed with lemon-lime soda and cranberry juice. All of these drinks will keep you hydrated and give you a full feeling — especially good if you've got a match scheduled the next day!

4. Scan over your options and make a food plan. Make sure to fill half your plate with fresh produce and reserve a majority of the other side for whole-grain breads/crackers and lean protein, like turkey or bean dip. Don't forget to save a small place on your plate for a bite of dessert to harness those sweet cravings, but make sure to dedicate three quarters of your plate to fruits, veggies, lean meats and grains.

5. Prioritize your fat choices. Plan for one or two sources of fat, choosing options like cheese or a dip for your veggies. Fats

are necessary for a healthy diet and help aid normal satiety and fullness.

6. Select a healthier dessert option.

Fruit-based desserts like pie are great to get nutrients while you indulge in something sweet. Lighter options like oatmeal or gingersnap cookies or pumpkin pie in a graham cracker crust are also good choices. Pumpkin is a very nutritionally dense fall vegetable full of beta-carotene and fiber.

7. Load up your plate only once.

Try to stick to small portion sizes and don't go back for seconds. To make this easier and aid in digestion, sit down while you eat and take 20 to 30 minutes to enjoy your food, making sure to drink your hydrating beverage between bites. As I mentioned before, take time to socialize! Let the social aspect of the meal help keep you in cue with normal satiety.

8. Pause halfway through and again two-thirds through to keep your fullness in check. Ask yourself:





"How much more do I want and need?" Give yourself permission to stop when you are starting to feel comfortably full (a six or seven on a scale of one to 10, with 10 being uncomfortably full).

9. Give yourself a formal "stopping signal" that your eating time is over when you are starting to feel comfortably full. This signal could be as simple as throwing your plate away, or packaging up your leftovers and putting them away. Popping a breath mint is also an easy way to signal to yourself that you're all done.

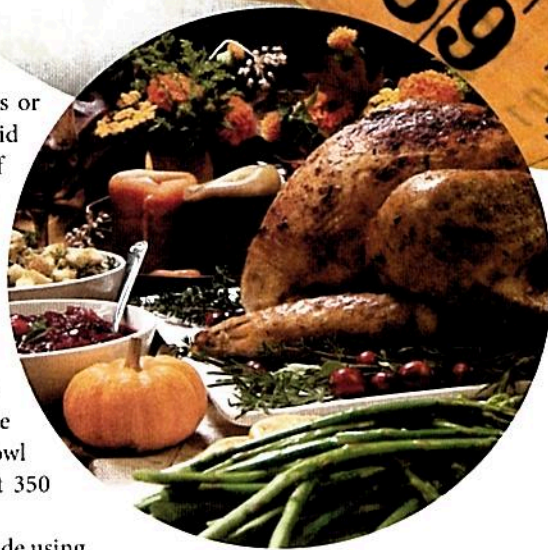
10. Sit facing away from the food while you eat. When you are finished, get up and mingle with other party guests to avoid the temptation to go for Round 2.

BONUS TIP: For holiday meals at home, start off the day with a light breakfast. Consider replacing the usual breakfast sausage with a homemade breakfast sausage made from ground turkey and dry breadcrumbs mixed with pepper, paprika, sage and diced onion. Go easy on frozen biscuits and crescent rolls with butter and eggs early in the day; save up those calories for the big dinner! Instead, try oatmeal, grits, toast or fresh fruit for a lighter start.

For snacks before the big meal, have raw vegetables, fruit and low-fat whole-

wheat crackers with yogurt dips or skim-milk cheeses. Try to avoid nuts, chips and sweets. One of my favorite low-fat options for a holiday meal is homemade cornbread stuffing. Made from breadcrumbs, crumbled cornbread, low-sodium bulion, onion, pepper and poultry seasoning, this recipe simply requires you to mix all of these ingredients in a large mixing bowl and bake in a non-stick pan at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Some other low-fat swaps include using low-sodium chicken bouillon instead of meat drippings for gravy mixes; acorn squash casserole as an alternate to sweet potato casserole; homemade cranberry sauce made from fresh cranberries, which has far less sugar than the canned varieties; and meringue pies with graham cracker crust as an alternative to high-fat, high-sugar pecan pies. It's also a good choice to select light meat rather than dark meat turkey, as it has less cholesterol and total fat.



TRY TO STICK TO SMALL PORTION SIZES AND DON'T GO BACK FOR SECONDS. TO MAKE THIS EASIER AND AID IN DIGESTION, SIT DOWN WHILE YOU EAT AND TAKE 20 TO 30 MINUTES TO ENJOY YOUR FOOD.



Page Love is a consultant for the ATP and WTA professional tennis tours and a member of the USTA Sport Science Committee. If you have more questions about nutrition, contact her at nutrifitga.com.