

## **How to Keep Festive While Keeping Your Shape: *Training Tips for Surviving the Holidays***

By Carrie Morgan

Thanksgiving is fast approaching, with Christmas and New Years waiting in the wings. This is a joyful time of year and shouldn't be looked upon with doom and gloom, fear and fret. Here are some tips to help you keep your chin up and your weight down so you can focus on the true essence of the season.

**Eat a nutritious meal before attending parties.** It might sound contradictory to eat in preparation of consuming even more, however, a small, nutritious 200 calorie snack eaten an hour before you arrive to the party will keep you from voraciously attacking the buffet moments after steaming through the host's front door.

**Limit alcohol.** Alcohol is not calorie free, containing nearly twice as many calories per gram than carbohydrates, and almost as many as fats. Furthermore, it actually stimulates appetite. Substitute with sparkling water with lime or Virgin Bloody Mary's.

Non-alcoholic drinks can be high in calories too. Try calorie-free herb tea instead of your usual full fat carton of eggnog or triple grande frappalatte extra whip mochachinos. A little cinnamon or peppermint tea will put you in the seasonal spirit just as easily as those fattening, high-calorie alternatives but without the guilt and ill effects.

**Monitor food intake with a food journal.** It will help you to stay accountable to yourself while you monitor what you're actually eating on a regular basis. Chances are if you have to write down those sugar cookies, you won't eat them.

**Moderation.** Even the big snack companies are capitalizing on the old cliché "everything in moderation" by cleverly packaging unhealthy foods in convenient 100-calorie portions. No matter how "good-for-you" the wrapper may claim, we all know that cookies are not nutritious in the least. The point is, if you're going to be exiled from your family for not eating Aunt Alice's fat-laden, sugar-spiked heirloom-recipe fruitcake, eat it, but keep it to a minimum (may not be as hard as you think!).

Do you remember when you were a kid drawing a Thanksgiving turkey by tracing your hand? Keep that vision of your childhood masterpiece in the forefront of your mind this season with these "handy" portion control tips:

- 1) Lean meat portions should be about 2-3 oz, or the size of the palm of your hand.
- 2) Starchy carbohydrates (like potatoes or rice) should be the size of your clinched fist.

- 3) High fiber carbohydrates (vegetables) can be enjoyed by the handful, or the size of your cupped hand piled high.
- 4) High fat and high sugar foods should be consumed sparingly, or remind yourself by “pinching” your thumb and index finger together, as if to say “just a pinch”.

**Plan ahead when you know you’ll be indulging, but don’t skip meals** lest you be famished and overindulge. Eating regular meals helps to keep your blood sugar stabilized and your metabolism stoked. Aim for 3 ounces of lean protein, a half-cup of whole grains (like oats or brown rice), and a serving of veggies every 3-4 hours.

**Don’t skip the gym.** Make adjustments to your busier-than-normal schedule by fitting shopping, parties, and family visits around your exercise rather than in place of your exercise. If you have to shorten your workouts, you’re far better off than skipping them all together. Even a slight decline will help you to maintain your physical fitness through the holidays rather than losing your shape or changing your shape-- from an hourglass to a pear. You’ll have increased energy, enhanced moods, and most importantly, you won’t have to start all over with the resolutioners on January 1st.

**Multitask** by turning your Christmas shopping into a workout. Start with comfortable clothes and appropriate footwear. After all, you wouldn’t go to the gym in your heels now would you? Men, don’t answer that. Save time looking for a parking space by taking the farthest spot from the mall entrance, then high-tail it into the mall with a brisk walk. Forget Santa’s sleigh; load your arms up with heavy shopping bags full of goodies and do some bicep curls while you walk the mall. Take the stairs instead of the elevators and escalator. Resist the urge to stroll, remember, you’re trading gym time to finish your shopping. Make the most of it by finishing with a few laps around the mall at a quick pace. You might be surprised at what a great workout you can get without sacrificing your to-do list.

**Get outside.** Cool fall and winter nights are a great time to bundle up and go for a walk. If you keep the pace brisk, you’ll gladly welcome the chill in the air. You can turn this into a fun family exercise by challenging each other to a friendly speed walking race. Make your evening walks more festive by looking at the bright Christmas lights and cheerfully decorated houses in your neighborhood. Travel different streets each time you walk so you won’t get bored with the scenery.

**Splurge** on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Years Eve ONLY, not the weeks leading up to and following those days. In Bill Phillips’ book, *Eating For Life*, he suggests a “free day” where you forget your daily routine and enjoy eating whatever you want, whenever you want, in whatever amount and

combination you so desire for one day of the week. Let me reiterate and reemphasize for those of you who may have blipped out at the word “splurge”; ONE day of the week, not successive days turned into weeks of binging on pecan pies, fudge, and peanut brittle. Choose a specific Christmas party or holiday for your free day each week and enjoy Grandma’s famous homemade holiday treats. It’ll help you to feel more festive and will keep you out of munchie mischief the rest of the week. Be sure to start off the following day with a healthful breakfast and maintain boosted activity throughout the day.

Don’t use “the holidays” as an excuse for poor nutritional and exercise decisions. Give yourself a reason to really celebrate this New Year’s by resolving to stay active and eat healthy between now and then. It’s worth it!