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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Watch What You Eat During the Holidays

The most fattening days of the year are the ones sandwiched between now and New Year's day. A handful of Christmas tree-shaped cookies here, a couple of missed workouts there, and before the last chorus of Bob and Doug McKenzie's "the twelve days of christmas" is sung, your scale registers a few extra pounds.

Where does this holiday heft come from? Those additional calories can sneak up on you even if you're trying to "behave." But believe it or not, it is possible to navigate through the holiday season and remain within your calorie budget. Below are a few top tips for doing just that.

Don't let your fingers do the walking: By avoiding anything that doesn't require a knife, fork and spoon to eat, you eliminate high fat, high calorie choices. Many of the appetizers that circulate at holiday parties go for upwards of 300 calories a pop. And who can eat just one? Two notable exceptions are raw veggies and shrimp.

Be a buffet slayer: Cruise buffet tables and survey the offerings before going in for the kill. Once it's on your plate you'll feel obligated to eat it. And the better stuff may be down at the end, tempting you to come back for seconds because your plate is already full. Be last in line; the fattening stuff will be gone. Choose foods that are high in water content and fiber like veggie and fruit dishes, clear soups and non-oily salads. Try everything, but limit the quantities of the fried stuff.

Be a thoughtful eater: Don't just blindly gobble up nuts and chips. Stop and think. Is what you're putting in your mouth worth an extra workout? If you really want to nibble on some party mix, put it on a plate so you're conscious about how much you're "nibbling" and how it will add up. Wait at least 20 minutes before you go back for seconds; that's how long it takes your stomach to signal your brain that it's full. Even if you don't keep an exercise and food diary at any other time during the year, keep one during the holiday season. It will keep you honest and help you monitor your excesses and successes.

Be careful how you quench your thirst: Most alcoholic drinks deliver over 100 calories an ounce -- and believe us when we tell you they are not exactly high in fiber. In addition, try to avoid those alcoholic drinks that contain milk, cream or fruit juice. Many are filled with sugar (empty calories) and fat (extra calories). Try wine spritzers or alternate each alcoholic drink with a glass of water, diet soda or flavored seltzer to cut your consumption.

Make working out a priority: Yes, it's harder to keep up with your workouts when you toss traveling, shopping, gift wrapping, baking and a whole host of other holiday-related activities into the mix. However, during the holiday season, it is even more important to be consistent with your exercise program. Besides counteracting extra holiday calories, exercise reduces stress and gives you more energy. Sure, you may have to get creative about slipping your workout in, but doing it will help you get through the holidays without gaining the weight.

Live by the 90-10 rule: After all, the holidays are about having fun and celebrating life. While they shouldn't totally focus on eating and drinking, you may feel left out if you don't get a taste of some of those once-a-year treats. To compromise, do everything right 90 percent of the time and allow yourself to let loose and "cheat" the other 10 percent of the time. You'll enjoy the festivities without carrying them around on your waistline the rest of the year.