

# HOW TO MAKE THE HOLIDAYS HEALTHIER

*A good diet, exercise, and stress management can reduce the pressure on you*

## **CATE REYNOLDS**

**T**he holiday season is officially here! While they result in wonderful celebrations with family and friends, those festivities can take a toll on our bodies, physically and mentally. Health and the holidays may seem impossible to pair, but a few simple changes can help you stay healthy from November through the new year and avoid that post-holiday slump.

### ***EATING HEALTHY DURING THE HOLIDAYS***

The seemingly never-ending flow of decadent treats and indulgent meals makes it challenging to eat healthy during the holidays, but it isn't impossible. These tips can help you still enjoy all the delicious offerings in a healthier way.

#### **MAKE THE SWAP FOR HEALTHIER INGREDIENTS**

There are plenty of ingredient substitutions that can make your favorite holiday dishes a bit healthier. In many recipes, you can substitute Greek yogurt for sour cream, oil for butter, nut milk for cream or half-and-half, and dark chocolate for milk chocolate. These simple swaps allow you to enjoy your favorite dishes in a more guilt-free way.

#### **OPT FOR HOMEMADE**

While pre-made, processed, or canned foods will save you time in the kitchen, they won't help your health. Making dishes yourself allows you to avoid excess sugar and salt common in processed food.

#### **TAKE YOUR TIME**

We're usually all a bit eager to eat at a







holiday meal, and it's easy to quickly scarf down all that tasty food and head for seconds. But one of the best tips for healthy holiday eating is to eat slowly. Doing so gives our stomachs enough time to let our brains know we're full, helping us avoid overeating.

#### **STAY HYDRATED**

Be sure to mix in plenty of water between those holiday cocktails. Proper hydration can help boost your metabolism, control calorie consumption, control hunger, fight exhaustion, and aid digestion by helping your body process and absorb nutrients properly.

### ***EXERCISING DURING THE HOLIDAYS***

We all know the importance of exercise, but we still tend to be more sedentary during the holidays. But given the stress and all those delicious meals and treats, staying active is extremely important for physical, mental, and emotional health. Even if a family 5K on Thanksgiving morning isn't your thing, there are plenty of ways you can stay moving through the holidays.

#### **ADJUST YOUR WORKOUT SCHEDULE**

With a surplus of social gatherings and errands, schedules become busier during the holidays. Be realistic about changes in your schedule, and adjust your workout routine. Instead of your regular 30-minute routine, opt for a quick 15-minute workout. Some exercise is always better than none!

#### **WALK, WALK, WALK**

There are plenty of ways to get your steps in during the holidays. Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator. Park far away



from the store entrance while running errands, or do an extra few laps in the fall while shopping. After enjoying a big meal with your family, suggest a post-meal walk. Not only will you get exercise, but walking after a meal helps digestion and lower blood sugar.

#### **TRY AN APP**

Travel is typical at this time, which means you might not have access to a gym or normal exercise equipment. There are many apps that offer workouts you can do practically anywhere and require little to no equipment. Some popular fitness apps include Nike Training Club, Peloton, Apple Fitness+, and Sweat.

#### **MANAGING STRESS DURING THE HOLIDAYS**

Feeling stressed or overwhelmed during the holidays is not uncommon. A National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) survey found that 75% of people say that the holidays contribute to feeling sad or dissatisfied, and 63% feel too much pressure during the holiday season. A little self-care can go a long way to combat the holiday blues.

#### **PRACTICE MINDFULNESS**

The holidays are filled with distractions that can prevent us from being present. Practicing mindfulness helps us center ourselves mentally and emotionally, thus reducing stress and anxiety. It can be done through breathing exercises, grounding techniques, and meditation. Meditation apps like Headspace and Calm offer different guided meditations and courses to help you practice mindfulness.

#### **STICK TO A SLEEP SCHEDULE**

Stress often leads to poor sleep quality, which can negatively impact our energy level, mood, and eating habits. One way to combat this is by sticking to a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same times each day, and aim for a minimum of 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

#### **TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF**

While time with friends and family is important, it's equally important to give yourself time to decompress. Whether it's enjoying your favorite movie and a cup of tea, reading a good book, or spending time outdoors, take moments to rest and recharge.