

DIET WRECKERS

Celebrate the holidays without packing on pounds with advice from the experts.

by Anne Marie O'Connor

'Tis the season to be jolly—and for every kind of food-related temptation, from Christmas cookies to heavy holiday meals and booze-y fetes. “We all have challenges during holidays, when food seems to show up everywhere we go,” says Lori Herold, RDN, a dietitian in private practice in Palm Harbor, FL, who also offers nutrition counseling to Suncoast Pilates clients.

Avoiding these common diet derailers will allow you to eat healthfully while enjoying the season.

DIET DERAILER #1: SKIPPING LUNCH

You skip breakfast and then have a plain green salad for lunch to “save” calories so you can eat without guilt at the big party...but then you’re so hungry you overdo it big time. “This is completely opposite of what you want to do,” says explains Emily Freeman, MS, RD, LD, a dietitian at NutriFormance in Frontenac, MO, and a STOTT PILATES® instructor. “Cutting back or limiting your food intake can slow your metabolism, mess up your normal hunger cues, and make splurging or going overboard more likely. If you have a consistent, healthy lifestyle, a party will not derail your hard work.”

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **DO THE SAME OLD, SAME OLD.** “Eat your normal breakfast, lunch and snacks through the day so you feel fuller going into the event,” Freeman advises. You’ll also be better able to resist the extra treats that always seem to materialize this time of year.
- **DON’T SKIP YOUR WORKOUT.** “Try and stay as consistent with exercise as possible,” she adds, even if that means you only have time for shorter sessions.
- **MAKE DIET TWEAKS, NOT DRAMATIC MODIFICATIONS.** “Don’t feel like you have to make drastic changes to your typical diet, just plan to make small adjustments as events come up,” Freeman says. If you know your office party is that night, maybe skip the two squares of dark chocolate you usually have after lunch, but don’t skip lunch altogether.

DIET DERAILER #2: BOOZE

Between the parties, the get-togethers with friends and family, and the glass of wine (or three) you have to unwind from all the seasonal stress, it can be a 80-proof season. All that booze, however, is high in empty calories and can add up to extra pounds. You could just designate yourself the driver for the whole season, but that’s no fun.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **CHOOSE A LOWER-CALORIE LIBATION.** “I tell clients to first work on switching from sugary

drinks to a glass of wine or prosecco,” versus a sugar-laden margarita or vodka and tonic, says Kelly Ahearn, MS, RDN, CDN, the employee health and wellness coordinator and nutritionist at Odyssey House and a Pilates teacher in New York City. But she warns, a lower-calorie drink (like light beer) doesn’t mean you should imbibe twice as much. A bubbly fan? Sparkling wines are lower in alcohol, so you won’t get as drunk.

- **“TRICK” YOURSELF INTO DRINKING LESS.** “You can’t control how much you’re served, but you can take smaller sips and drink water in between, so you make the drink last longer,” Ahearn says. And don’t think you have to order a refill every time your tablemates do. Drinking more slowly, so you have some left in your glass when the waiter comes by, “is a sneaky way to not keep up with them.”
- **DRINK A GLASS OF WATER BETWEEN EVERY COCKTAIL.** “Dehydration can disguise itself as hunger, so stay hydrated,” says Freeman.
- **EATING IS NOT CHEATING.** Drinking on an empty stomach “will rebound later on,” says Ahearn. “Alcohol stimulates your appetite, so later that night, you’ll realize how hungry you are after drinking too much, and you’ll just go for it once you’re home. So I always tell people, have some nuts or another snack with protein before they start drinking.”

DIET DERAILER #3: COCKTAIL PARTIES

Cocktail parties ambush weight watchers with a one-two calorie punch: booze (see above) and high-fat appetizers. “They’re also usually scheduled at happy-hour time, and the food usually consists of ‘small bites,’ which are more calorie-dense, and make multiple trips back to the food table more likely,” says Freeman.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **EMPHASIZE THE PRODUCE.** “Focus on fruits and veggies taking up most of your plate (think half to three-quarters of the plate), then choose some of the heavier meat/cheese options for the rest,” suggests Freeman.
- **SAVOR SLOWLY.** “If something is out of this world, enjoy it,” says Freeman. “Take a longer time to eat it, rather than scarfing it down and rushing back for seconds.”
- **PAUSE BETWEEN PLATES.** “Don’t feel like you have to get all your food at once,” she adds.

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"Eat a plateful, then pause to see if you're really still hungry."

- **KEEP YOUR DISTANCE.** Don't stand near the food table or kitchen, where waiters will be passing by with trays full of appetizers, says Herold, who also works for a large health-care system. "You tend to eat more food when you are standing next to all the finger foods."



DIET DERAILER #4: FAMILY FEASTS

For many families, food is love, and refusing a second ginormous helping of Grandma's sausage stuffing can cause hurt feeling—and family drama. "Food is a big part of the holiday celebrations and family

traditions," points out Herold.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **BYO.** "If the party is a potluck, offer to bring an appetizer, side dish or a fruit plate for dessert to ensure there will be something healthy for you to eat," says Herold.
- **REVIEW YOUR OPTIONS.** "Before you start to fill your plate, survey the offerings on the buffet," she adds. "Choose the items that you really want and eat them mindfully."
- **VEGGIES FIRST.** "Load your plate with vegetables, then take a little bit of whatever else you like," recommends Ahearn. "If you love your aunt's macaroni and cheese but you're on a weight-loss plan, take a spoonful, eat it, savor it, enjoy it...but that's it."
- **CHOOSE SECONDS WISELY.** "If you're still physically hungry, opt for some form of protein and more vegetables," says Herold.
- **REFUSE POLITELY.** "If someone pushes a second helping on you, say, oh, I would love to, but I'm stuffed and would love to take some home," Ahearn recommends.

DIET DERAILER #5: LEFTOVERS

A weeklong graze-fest of leftover stuffing, mashed potatoes and pecan pie can do more damage to a diet than Thanksgiving itself.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **GIVE THEM AWAY.** "If you are hosting a dinner celebration, purchase some plastic containers for your guests to take food home," says Herold. (In a pinch, you can even use Ziploc bags or aluminum foil.)

- **FREEZE THEM.** Put half of what's left in the freezer. "Those leftovers will come in handy when you're faced with a time-crunch during the holidays," says Freeman.

- **TURN LEFTOVERS INTO HEALTHY DISHES.** "If you have a bone-in ham, make a healthy split pea soup," says Herold. "Leftover turkey can be used in sandwiches, tacos or a quiche."

DIET DERAILER #6: FOOD AT WORK

Between the homemade Christmas cookies, clients who send edible gifts and the coworker who keeps candy on her desk, there may be as many treats in your office as a convenience store. "If you follow a moderate, healthy nutrition routine, one cookie is not going to derail all your progress," says Freeman. "However, multiple cookies each day, for several days, can add up."

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **ENJOY...A LITTLE.** "Because it is the holidays, we should enjoy our food," says Ahearn. "If someone brings in something that's your absolute favorite, have it, enjoy it and move on. There's nothing that's hands-off if you keep it to a very small portion."
- **BE SELECTIVE.** Not all treats are created equal. "A tray of butter cookies is not anything special, but a plate of homemade, intricately decorated cookies are, so [skip the former] and take time to enjoy the latter," says Freeman.
- **SAY NO THANKS.** Sometimes it can feel rude to not take a piece of cake or a doughnut. "If someone brings in cupcakes, but you don't really care for them, politely say, no, or I'm full, or I had a late lunch, or can I take one for later," suggests Ahearn. "Wrap it up, put it in the fridge or freezer for later."
- **KEEP HEALTHIER SNACKS AT YOUR DESK.** Ahearn recommends keeping things like fruit and nuts at your desk so you're not as tempted by the candy, cookies and cake.

DIET DERAILER #7: THE TIME-CRUNCH

Another reason it can be hard to keep your eating in check is that you don't have as much time to plan and prepare healthy dishes like salads, vegetables, whole grains and beans, and lean protein, which tend to require a lot of prep time. "People think everything has to be made from scratch," says Ahearn, but it's possible to eat well with minimal kitchen time.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **GO FOR HEALTHY GRAB-AND-GO OPTIONS.** At every grocery store, "there are premade

salads, precut vegetables, cut-up celery and carrots, and hummus for healthy snacks, and bags of spinach you can add to your meals," says Ahearn.

- **COOK IN BATCHES.** "Doing some extra cooking on the weekends or using a Crock-Pot can help to provide better balanced meals," says Herold.

- **DON'T BE AFRAID TO DINE OUT.** Takeout and restaurant meals "don't have to be a calorie overload," says Freeman. "Choose a dish that is mainly fruits and/or vegetables, along with some lean protein, healthy fats and healthy carbohydrates (quinoa, beans, lentils brown rice, whole grains)." If it's a large portion, she recommends taking home half for lunch the next day.

DIET DERAILER #8: TEMPTING TREATS ALL OVER THE PLACE

The endless holiday goodies everywhere you look, from the coffee shop to your kitchen counter, can disrupt your best intentions.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **KEEP THE NOSH AT WORK.** If you get say, a jumbo can of popcorn at work as a gift, "try a bite or two, but don't take it home," says Wesley Delbridge, RDN, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "We need to understand that we don't have self-discipline and just need to act on it. Instead, I always put it out for the whole staff." (Then see number 6.)
- **PORTION IT OUT.** Delbridge recommends putting individual servings in baggies, which makes it less likely you'll eat the whole container.
- **REGIFT IT.** "When you get, say those Harry and David gift baskets, spread the love," he adds. "Maybe give the jams to a neighbor."

- **THROW IT AWAY.** If you don't have anyone to give it to, enjoy a little, then toss it, says Delbridge. "We're guilt-ridden about throwing food away, but it's okay to throw it away when eating it will end up compromising your health."

DIET DERAILER #9: ALL THE TRAVEL

Planes, trains and automobiles make healthy eating a challenge, but don't let your travel plans run your diet off the road.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **SCOPE OUT AIRPORT RESTAURANTS.** "Look up what restaurants are at an airport, and

make a plan for where you should eat," says Delbridge.

- **LIMIT THE PRE-FLIGHT COCKTAILS.** "A lot of people have a drink because of their anxiety about flying," he notes. "When you drink alcohol, your inhibitions go down, and you'll say yes to more bad foods." So plan your meals and snacks beforehand—and don't get on the plane with tons of junk food.

- **PACK SOME GOOD-FOR-YOU SNACKS.** Herold recommends nuts, fruit (apples, oranges, grapes and bananas travel well), raw veggies, whole-grain crackers, reduced-fat cheese, natural almond or peanut butter, tuna in pouches, unsweetened dry fruits and Quest or Lara bars. Keep perishables in a cooler. "If you're driving, there are coolers that plug into your car and also in electrical outlets," Herold says. "If you are traveling [by] plane, you can use a cooler with gel ice packs. All dry foods are allowed" by the TSA.

- **STOCK UP AT YOUR DESTINATION.** "Pick up healthy foods like yogurt, milk, reduced-fat cheese and water," she adds. (Make sure your hotel has a mini-fridge.)



DIET DERAILER #10: YOU'RE HURT

While injuries are not limited to the holidays, not being able to work out can make maintaining or losing weight even more difficult this time of year. But that doesn't mean weight gain is inevitable.

HOW TO STAY ON TRACK

- **FOCUS ON THE "FILLING THREE."** "Protein, fat and fiber help keep us more satisfied," says Ahearn.
- **EAT MORE...VEGETABLES THAT IS.** "That's not so exciting," Ahearn admits, but they're key to weight control, especially when you're less active than usual.

- **EAT LESS SUGAR AND FATS.** "Be mindful of limiting extra calories in the forms of sugars and fats, which your body does not need," says Herold.

- **DO SOMETHING.** Ask your doctor if you can continue your Pilates routine. Also, this may be a good time to try meditation. "Meditation has been studied for years; it might help with reducing appetite, when you [practice] mindful eating," recommends Ahearn. **PS**

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