

FOOD, STRESS, AND THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Tips for managing food and stress during the holidays

:: **Plan ahead.** Think of a friend or family member who you can call when you are feeling stressed. We have feelings and emotions that resurface during the holiday season and it is important to have a plan for when those feelings arise so that we do not behave in a self-destructive way.

:: **Take care of your body!** Traveling during the holiday season can be physically exhausting. Make sure your body has an opportunity to stretch and that your muscles are given a break and a chance to relax.

:: **Be sure to get enough sleep!** The hustle and bustle of the holiday season may be exciting, but depriving your mind and body of sleep can create an unhealthy imbalance, which will interfere with your ability to handle stress positively.

:: **Listen to your body!** During the holiday season it is easy to neglect our hunger and fullness signals. Try to maintain a balanced meal system and be kind to yourself about what you are eating.

:: **Take time for yourself!** Plan to spend some time everyday—even if it is only 10 minutes—to take a walk, write, or just be. In order to maintain a perspective on the holiday season, it is important that you take some time to reflect on your experiences and the meaning of the holidays. Try to think about what is truly important in your life.

:: **Make sure that there is food available that you feel comfortable eating.** Check ahead with the host and find out about ingredients if it will put you at ease. Offer to bring a dish so that you are sure there will be food available for you. It is ideal to have as little anxiety as possible surrounding the food, especially during the holiday season.

:: **Be curious.** If you find that you are berating yourself for over-indulging or eating foods you normally would not eat, try not to be judgmental about those feelings. Write in a journal, call a friend, or talk about it with your therapist. Remember that the food is just a symptom of the emotions and everything else that you are feeling.

:: **Enjoy yourself!** Make sure you take time to enjoy the people around you and the essence of the holiday season. Television depictions of the holidays do not resemble the reality that accompanies the festivities. Every family encounters stress and every family has a different holiday experience. Try to enjoy the special moments by creating memories instead of fussing over unfulfilled expectations.

:: **Focus on aspects of life unrelated to food and weight!** Take a break from the repetitive messages about body image on television or in magazines. Do something you would not normally do—go for a hike, volunteer at a soup kitchen, or visit with friends. The holidays are a time for reflection and celebration, so make sure you take time to do both with the people you care about.