

Holiday Stress Busting

Eat, Drink, Spend ... and be Miserable?

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Keeping Food in Balance

According to the American Heart Association, we run the risk of gaining five or more pounds between Halloween and New Years. We add an average of 200 calories **more** per day than we really need.

Such calories come from that ounce of fudge we can't resist, that extra helping of gravy, that one glass too many of eggnog or that irresistible slice of pecan pie. Our senses are overwhelmed with the smells of caramel apples, and savory baked turkeys. It seems almost impossible to take refuge in sitting as far away from the decorative tables abound with rich pastries and trays of scrumptious hors d'oeuvres bombarding us at every turn.

Typically, holiday gatherings subtly encourage people to indulge in high-fat, high-calorie foods and drink empty calories that are low in nutrients. On top of that, we're more likely to make excuses for skipping, or skimping, on our daily exercise.

Remember: more calories in and less calories burned means weight gain.

Sipping on water and nibbling carrots when most everyone around us is devouring every morsel they can find only compounds our challenge. The secret is to indulge yourself *a little*, but within reason, that is, indulge in some **long range planning to maintain overall balance in your food consumption**. With a little **preplanning**, you can maintain a healthy lifestyle over the holidays and still be merry.

For instance, sugar consumption is one of the most significant dangers to your diet. Being on a sugar roller coaster can trigger a slew of other problems, some even emotional. When you binge on sugar, you crave more and more and your metabolism slows down. Along with sunlight deprivation, sugar binges cause a drop in serotonin, a chemical in the brain that regulates sleep and appetite. A lack of serotonin is often associated with depression. When you're deprived of serotonin, you won't feel calm and in control.

To help naturally boost your serotonin levels try to eat small but frequent meals that include complex carbohydrates and starchy veggies. You can also help control blood sugar levels by eating small quantities of protein three times a day. A diet of two egg

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whites in the morning, some turkey at lunch and a small portion of grilled fish at night is a move toward moderation and weight stability.

You definitely need to keep up your regular exercise during the holidays and *accept no excuses*. Exercise also increases your endorphins. When endorphin levels are high, we cope better with stress and eat only what we need.

If you have the opportunity to bring food to a party, offer to bring a low-fat/low-calorie snacks like pretzels, wheat crackers, or unbuttered popcorn, so that you will have something healthy to eat.

Remember that willpower and preplanning are the keys to being a guilt-free guest this holiday season.

Keeping Stress in Balance

It is funny how we allow our stress to take away from the true meaning of the holidays. If your house isn't perfectly clean, it is not the end of the world, but missing an opportunity to laugh with family may be a huge loss. During the next few weeks, many of us will get stressed over visiting company, finances, buying gifts, eating or drinking too much.

Here is a simple guide to having merry, and peaceful, stress-less holiday season.

RAISE YOUR:

- **Mood** for more joyfulness. Being positive is contagious and lends itself to happier interactions.
- **Heart Rate** for at least 30 minutes. Getting out in the fresh air for brisk walk can do the trick. Choose an appropriate level of activity for your age, sex, health status.
- **Sensitivity** for moderation. There is nothing like knowing your limits when it comes to rich food and fancy drinks. Pacing yourself can make your holiday more enjoyable, guiltless, and healthy.
- **Awareness** for living within your budget. Getting into debt takes the joy out of giving. Gifts should be from the heart: *"It's the thought that counts!"*
- **Tolerance** for disarray, disappointment and change in plans. Remember it is only *you* that cares about completing every last thing on your list. It's *your* list, no one else needs to know what's on it. Be flexible.
- **Appreciation** for what is truly meaningful. Is it the turkey, tree ornaments or people we are around that make the holidays special? Knowing what is truly important can make the difference between a frenzied and a fun-filled holiday season.

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Keeping Your Checkbook in Balance

In these uncertain economic times, it is not at all wise to rely on chance and impulse when you go holiday shopping. More than ever, you need a plan, a budget, and the resolve to stick to them both.

*Remember: The holidays are a time to acknowledge the importance of family and friends -- **that** isn't measured in dollars ... but your BUDGET is!!*

So, it's time to get very analytical, especially if you've had problems with holiday budgets in the past.

Let's say you have a TOTAL BUDGET amount to spend (whether it's cash or credit is not important here). You naturally have some people you want to spend relatively more money on (for whatever reason) and some you need to spend just a token amount on (for whatever reason); there is also usually a group in between. You've probably always had such a priority list "in your head," but if you've had money trouble in the past, now is the time to write it all down. This may seem a bit "harsh" but you have probably done this informally (in your head) already ... has that worked? Probably not or you wouldn't be reading this!

How we do it: The number of people in each group times the average amount you spend per person in each group, summed over all the groups, has to equal your TOTAL budget.

Also, we are going to figure out how much we should be spending, on average, per person in each group...*ahead of time, before we hit the mall*. That's the plan that will enable us to stick to our budget. We do this *before* we go shopping so we can have some "rules" to "pay" by.

You can go to the *Holiday Budget Worksheet* that is appended if the algebra befuddles you.

Here is the simple formula:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{TOTAL BUDGET} &= (\# \text{ people in group 1 high}) \times (\text{average spend per group 1 high}) \\ &+ (\# \text{ people in group 2 medium}) \times (\text{average spend per group 2 medium}) \\ &+ (\# \text{ people in group 3 low}) \times (\text{average spend per group 3 low}) \end{aligned}$$

We know the TOTAL BUDGET and the number of people in each group, high (N_1), medium (N_2) or low (N_3). How do we figure the average spend?

We can actually solve this algebra very easily if we assign RELATIVE WEIGHT (RW) amounts for the average spend. The average spend is the number of people times the relative weight ("how many

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times the lowest") of the group times the minimal Spending Unit "SU" (which is the same for every group).

Average group spend = $N \times RW \times SU$ (SU is the same for each group; N and RW are not)

Then we want to know the value of one Spend Unit so we can calculate the average amount to spend per person in each group (which is $RW \times SU$). So, the above equation would be:

TOTAL BUDGET = $(N_1 \times RW_1 \times SU) + (N_2 \times RW_2 \times SU) + (N_3 \times RW_3 \times SU)$

We rearrange to get the key equation, which is very simple to program in a spreadsheet:

$$SU = \text{TOTAL BUDGET} / ((RW_1 \times N_1) + (RW_2 \times N_2) + (RW_3 \times N_3))$$

An example will help: let's say we want to spend, relatively, ONE Spend Unit ("SU") on the low group ($W_3=1$), THREE times as much (three times a Spend Unit) on the medium group ($W_2=3$) and FIVE times as much (five times a Spend Unit, "SU") on the high group ($W_1=5$).

$SU = \text{TOTAL BUDGET} / ((5 \times N_1) + (3 \times N_2) + (1 \times N_3))$

If we have \$1000 TOTAL BUDGET to spend, 6 people in group 1 high ($N_1=6$) and 5 in group 2 medium ($N_2=5$) and 10 people in group 3 low ($N_3=10$):

$SU = 1000 / ((5 \times 6) + (3 \times 5) + (1 \times 10)) = 1000 / (30+15+10) = \18.18

So we aim for an *average* amount spend of about \$18 per person in the low group, \$54 (=3x18) in the medium group and \$90 (=5x18) in the high group. You can change the relative weightings (RW) of the units (the 1, 3 and 5) and the number of people in each group and just recalculate the value of the "SU" unit and then the average spend per person per group. The numbers are rounded because this is just a guide.

Here's another example: You can use decimals if you know the simple math (e.g. spending 50% and 150% more for the medium and high groups would be $RW_2=1.50$ and $RW_3=2.50$). If we have \$2000 TOTAL Budget to spend, 10 people in group 1, 7 in group 2 and 10 in group 3, and our RW are 1.50 and 2.50: $SU = 2000 / ((2.50 \times 10) + (1.50 \times 7) + (1 \times 10))$, so $SU = \$44$ and the average spend would be high group \$110, medium group \$66, and low group \$44.

You can, and will, spend a little more or less on any particular person in the group, but the *average* that you spend per group should be around what you calculate, then the total budget will be approximately on target. If you need to make changes as you go shopping, you'll have to recalculate based on the remaining budget and people.

Now you have a plan and a budget, so don't get overly worried about the finances because they have been figured out ahead of time, away from the hustle and bustle.

HOW TO FEEL NICE AND NOT SO NAUGHTY AT THE HOLIDAY TABLE

- Try to focus on the meaning of the holiday, the festivities at hand and the reunion with others rather than the food.
- Rehearse ways to refuse food offerings that are not healthy.
- If you do find yourself feeling depressed, soothe your spirit with a massage, manicure, pedicure, or facial. Men can enjoy this too!
- **When you shop, eat before you leave home so you won't resort to** buying junk food at the mall.
- Just because it is the holidays doesn't mean you should give yourself the license to eat everything that passes by. Factor in the little extras into your daily intake. Take a meditative moment at least once a day to breathe deeply, clear your mind of all the clutter and get your priorities straightened out.
- Exercise an hour a day during the holidays. Exercise to burn calories, relieve stress, and elevate your endorphins and mood. A brisk walk, moderate run, or bike-ride are great and most people can do these easily.
- Eat some "good" fat. Eating moderate amounts of good fats during the holidays will satiate the appetite and prevent overeating of carbohydrate. (The "bad" fats are saturated and trans fats. "Good" fats are polyunsaturated fats such as found in fish oils, flaxseed oil, olive oil and others).
- **Don't skip meals. Hunger and low blood sugar lead to overeating.** Grazing is a good way to eat if you don't have time for sit down meals; just watch your total consumption.
- **Don't pass up favorite foods or deprive yourself completely. Moderate** consumption is the key. An occasional splurge is ok, if it is compensated for in your overall intake.
- **Don't tempt yourself** by keeping trigger foods or comfort foods around the house. If you have them, it certainly increases the likelihood that you will eat them.
- To satisfy your sweet tooth, set limits. For example, you might allow yourself two desserts per week at 250 calories each.
- **Plan meals by keeping in mind the demands you'll have on your schedule that** day.
- If you tend to overeat during family gatherings, plan and visualize what and how much you will eat before you go.
- Eat lightly during the day if you know you are going to have a big meal later. Also drink a great deal of water the day of the party.

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- Have a light, healthy snack an hour before the party. A small, low calorie protein shake is great for this.
- Do your socializing away from the food and alcohol.
- Avoid sugary drinks that only stimulate your appetite and make you more thirsty.
- **Alcoholic beverages pack on the calories so if you're drinking alcohol try** sticking to light beer or a champagne or wine cooler.
- Stay with low calorie and watery appetizers like cucumbers and celery.
- Choose the smallest size plate to eat from.
- Share a dessert with someone else.
- Take off all the rich and heavy toppings before digging in.
- If you are bringing food, make or buy low-fat wild-rice stuffing, baked sweet potatoes, whole-grain rolls or angel-food cake with fruit.
- If you are staying with family or friends ask them if you can have a space in the refrigerator and keep foods on hand to snack on like lean deli meats, cottage cheese, nonfat cheese sticks, etc.
- If you want to really keep yourself honest (the same clothing size) during the holiday season wear your most form-fitting blue jeans. Another trick is to tie a string or ribbon around your waist (under your shirt) that will not budge with the bulge.
- If you are at the mercy of the dinner host, eat modest amounts of the foods offered and fill up on foods with more fiber and fewer calories. Make a small plate and skip the seconds.

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Have A Slim, Sane & Stress-Free Holiday Season

BE FIT	STAY HAPPY	BE CALM	TAKE TIME	EASY DOES IT
Eat low fat	Smile often	Check your pulse and relax	Plan ahead	Watch overload and excesses
Watch calories and stay away from junk food	Find something positive to say about everything	Deep breath and release slowly	But don't over plan	Careful with promises
Drink lots of water	Enjoy your self	Accept that there is only one of you and 24hrs in a day	Make doable "to-do" lists	Give back within reason
Limit alcohol consumption	Delegate tasks	Slow down and listen to your state of mind	Visualize finishing the task	Accept life is not always fair
Snack on fruits and veggies	Plan some fun time for every day	Listen to relaxing music	Allow for spontaneity	Stop wanting everything to be perfect
Get appropriate** exercise every day	Get enough regular sleep every day	Ask for help if you need it	Stop and count your blessings	Live and let go

***for your age, sex, body size, health status, etc.*

Holiday Budget Worksheet

How much to spend, on average, per person for each group - See the Text

Step ↓	Group →	High	Medium	Low	Sum ↓
2	Relative Weight, RW	RW_1	RW_2	RW_3 (usually 1.0) <i>1.0</i>	
3	Number in Group, N	N_1	N_2	N_3	
4	Multiply RW x N	$RW_1 \times N_1$	$RW_2 \times N_2$	$RW_3 \times N_3$	
5	Sum High, Medium, Low				SUM (RWxN)
6	TOTAL BUDGET, \$	\$TB			
7	Spending Unit=TOTAL BUDGET/SUM	$SU = \$TB / SUM$			
8	Average Spend per Person per Group	$RW_1 \times SU$	$RW_2 \times SU$	$RW_3 \times SU$	

Step 1- Write down the people you want to get gifts for and group them into three groups depending on how much, **relatively**, you want to spend on each group, high, medium and low amount per person.

Step 2- For each group enter the **relative** amount or weight you want to give to each group, RW. Higher numbers mean spend relatively ("x times") more than lowest which is usually 1.0. For example, from high to low, this can be 5, 3, 1 or 2.5, 1.5, 1 and so forth. See the text for more info.

Step 3- Enter the number of people in each group, N.

Step 4- Multiply RW x N for each group (row #2 times #3).

Step 5- Sum the three products from #4 in #5.

Step 6- Enter the Total Budget (TB).

Step 7- Divide Total Budget by the Sum from #5 to get the Spending Unit, SU.

Step 8- Multiply the Relative Weights #2 by the Spending Unit (SU) from #7 for each column. This is the **average** amount you should spend for each group. Individuals in may get a little more or less than these numbers, but the averages should be kept to this number to stay in budget. Recalculate if necessary.

Be sure to check out "[Mind-ing Your Body: Mending Your Cravings](#)" as well as "[Look Good - Feel Good: Three Keys to a Healthier You](#)" both by Dr Arlene Unger, plus articles by other authors in the [RealPsychSolutionsStore.com](#), plus over 30 free mental health and living well articles from many authors at [RealPsychSolutions.com](#).

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