

Healthy eating hacks for the holiday season

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Silly season is upon us, and while we deserve the time out to relax and have fun, we also want to keep our healthy eating habits and goals on track. It's not easy as we're already caught up in the whirl of end of year celebrations and office parties.



There is no doubt that time to relax and enjoy ourselves is important to our well-being, but we tend to over-indulge in rich foods, sweet treats and alcohol over this period. At the same time, we are cutting back on regular physical activity and staying up too late, too often. Of course, you want to enjoy yourself, and it's certainly not the time to feel deprived, but you can avoid the holidays becoming an extended binge by using strategies to moderate the inevitable excesses.

We asked a team of registered dietitians from [ADSA \(Association for Dietetics in South Africa\)](#) to give us their top healthy eating hacks to help us make the most of enjoying the festive season without over-indulgence.

Mpho Tshukudu:

- **Don't let exercise fall by the wayside** – Keep to your exercise routine as far as possible. If you are going away and can't get to your regular gym or classes, find alternative physical activities. Being on holiday with more free time means you can actually increase the frequency and duration of your daily exercise.
- **Be conscious about what you drink** – All calories count. Spritz your wine with sparkling water, and drink water between glasses of alcohol. Be mindful too of your non-alcoholic drinks. Make your own home-brewed ice-tea flavoured with herbs such as mint and lemongrass, as well as fresh fruit like watermelon, berries and peaches.
- **Be wise at the buffet table** – Extravagant spreads of foods at the buffet or party tables can turn our heads. Walk around the buffet tables first to check out all the options, and then decide on what you'll have. Make sure you fill up half your plate with vegetables, especially the low carbohydrate options such as lettuce, cucumber, peppers, onions, green beans, tomato, broccoli and cauliflower.
- **Take 20 before seconds** – Don't automatically go back for more just because it was delicious and just because it is there. Wait 10 to 20 minutes before deciding you will have a second helping so that you give your brain time to register whether you are really still hungry. Strike up a conversation, drink a glass of water or dance. You may find that you forget about that second plate.

Julie Perks:

- **Don't party on an empty stomach** - Eat a healthy snack before heading out to a social function. This helps you to avoid overeating on arrival or being tempted to fill up on what may well be unhealthy treats and snacks. This is a healthy eating hack that can really help those who are trying to stick to a particular nutritional plan.
- **Bring along your favourite dish** – One of the problems of attending social occasions is that you don't know whether healthy options are going to be available. If you're going to a party or a gathering, bring along a shareable, favourite dish to contribute to the festivities and ensure you have a suitable meal or snack to enjoy in case there are no other healthy options.
- **Get outdoors more** – Make the most of the summer and get outdoors to do fun exercise as a family. Regular swimming, walking, running, cycling and family games and sports help to balance the season of extra indulgence.
- **Try alcohol-free** - Alcohol can be very high in energy and added sugars, especially if you're having festive cocktails or G&Ts. You can limit your alcohol intake or try the new zero alcohol options that are becoming a healthy lifestyle trend.

Alex Royal:

- **Portion alert!** - Keep your portions small and make only one visit to the table. Choose the smallest plate possible. Pile greens and other tasty veggies on your plate first, leaving just a little room for those high-calorie treats like sweets and cheeses. Eat small, lower-calorie meals during the day so you can enjoy a special treat later – just make sure you do not starve yourself for the party and overeat later.
- **Step away from the table** - If you don't put your food choices on a plate, you have no idea how much you are really eating. The worst thing you can do at a party is stand around the table dipping into the bowl.
- **Zen yourself** - Holidays can be stressful. Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Organise your time and make a list and prioritise the important activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. And don't forget to schedule some down time to relax.
- **Slip, don't slide** - If you eat three helpings of mashed potatoes and half a pie, all is not lost. Rather than polishing off the rest, learn from your slip-up. Next time, eat a salad first, start a conversation, and park yourself far from the danger zone. The next time starts today.

For some holiday season recipes that are both delicious and healthy, have a look at NutritionConfidence's [Sustainably Farmed Kob Stuffed with Fennel and Orange](#) and Alex Royal's [Christmas Themed Cranberry and Baby Spinach Salad](#).

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Association for Dietetics in South Africa



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