A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Eating Through the Holidays

Not around them.
Not in spite of them.
Through them.

Why the holidays are hard

It is rarely only about the food. Family, grief, money and old patterns all show up at the table. Here is what the research says.

47%
named grief or missing a loved one as a top holiday stressor
APA poll, 2024

41%
of women eat for comfort during the holidays, vs 31% the rest of the year
APA survey

1 lb
average holiday weight gain, and it was not lost the rest of the year
NIH, NEJM

Your holiday game plan

1. **Start the day with protein**
   Do not save up. Arriving starving makes every plate harder.
2. **Build your plate in order**
   Protein and vegetables first, then starches. Small studies show steadier blood sugar.
3. **Choose what you love**
   Take the holiday foods you look forward to. Skip the ones that are just there.
4. **Pause before seconds**
   Wait ten minutes with a glass of water. Ask: am I hungry, or feeling something?
5. **Plan your drinks**
   Set a number beforehand and alternate with water. Alcohol lowers your guard.
6. **Move and protect your sleep**
   Take a short walk after the meal. Stress and poor sleep both drive appetite up.

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When someone pushes food on you

People push food out of love, hosting pride or their own discomfort. It is rarely about you. Pick a line that feels like you:

> *"No thank you, I am full. It was delicious."*

> *"Everything looks wonderful. I will have some later."*

> *"You are such a good cook. I am going to pass on seconds."*

> *"I am pacing myself tonight, but thank you for thinking of me."*

When a feeling shows up

Stress, grief and family comments can send you to the kitchen. Try three steps:

NAME IT	PAUSE	CHOOSE
What am I feeling right now?	Breathe. Give it five minutes.	Food, or something else that helps?

Other ways to comfort yourself: a walk around the block, a cup of tea, a call to a friend, five slow breaths, helping in the kitchen, stepping outside for fresh air.

If you overeat

One meal is not the problem. What matters is the next decision. Return to your normal next meal. No punishing, no skipping, no starting over on Monday. Strict rules tend to backfire, and kindness works better.

My holiday plan

My biggest holiday trigger is:

My go-to sentence when someone pushes food:

My protein-first meal will be:

Something other than food that comforts me:

Sources: American Psychiatric Association Healthy Minds poll (2024); American Psychological Association holiday survey; NIH/NICHD, New England Journal of Medicine (2000); Harvard Health, How stress can make us overeat; Caton et al., Alcohol, appetite and loss of restraint (2015); Diabetes Care (2015) food-order study.