

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black dress and silver high-heeled sandals, is seated at a dining table. She has her hand to her forehead, looking thoughtful or stressed. The table is set with white plates, wine glasses, and various fruits like grapes and raspberries. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the woman's face and the table's details.

The candy, the feasting, the parties—it's not easy to be virtuous over the holidays, and the weight you gain can stick. Here's how not to get fat. By Alyssa Kolsky Hertzig

Season's **EATINGS**



Something about Halloween makes even the most disciplined woman let down her guard—and we're not talking about unfortunate sexy-nurse costumes. Halloween has become the unofficial tipping point when the otherwise health-conscious dive mouth-first into a season of holiday gluttony. The bender starts shortly before October 31 with the influx of fun-size Twix bars. So teeny! So cute! So easy to pop in your mouth! Next comes an entire day reserved for vacuuming up mountains of turkey and stuffing, closely followed by back-to-back December cocktail parties. Many Americans gain as much as five pounds over the holidays, according to The New England Journal of Medicine. And the really sobering news: That extra weight is likely to stay with you long after the champagne goes flat. The situation is not inevitable, though. Armed with a little planning and a few tricks, you can have happy holidays—without morphing into the Grinch Who Starved Her Way Through Christmas.

Halloween

You may think, Oh, what's one kernel of candy corn?

We'll tell you: It's a gateway drug that leads to a caloric free-for-all. In fact, in the week before Halloween, Americans buy 600 million pounds of candy—and those pounds have to go somewhere. Total sugar deprivation is near impossible, so don't bother attempting it. Instead, one word: lollipops. "Of my 15,000 patients, no one has even gained an ounce from them," says Stephen Gullo, a weight-loss expert in New York City and author of *The Thin Commandments Diet* (Rodale). "They take a long time to eat, and they're harder to binge on."

Once you accept that there will be candy in the house, set some ground rules. You don't have to dole out sad packets of raisins or baby carrots to trick-or-treaters. But if you can't resist M&M's, don't use Halloween as an excuse to have them around. "If you're a chocolate person, buy something like SweeTarts or gummies," says Lauren Slayton, a registered dietitian and founder of Foodtrainers. "If you're dying for chocolate, try 3 Musketeers or Tootsie Rolls, which are lower in calories than most." Whichever candy you go with, wait to stock up on it until the morning of October 31, so there is less time for it to whisper your name. Because once it's there, it's unavoidable: The average Halloween bucket holds about 250 pieces of candy and 9,000 calories, which means that unless you live next to the Duggars, you could be grazing for weeks. "Indulge for a day," says Madelyn Fernstrom, author of *The Real You Diet* (Wiley) and founding director of the Weight Management Center at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. "Then, on November 1, get rid of what's left." If you must hang on to a few pieces, Slayton recommends limiting yourself to a Ziploc bag's worth of candy (and that's a snack-size bag, not a gallon one).

Danger also lurks at work, where there'll be at least one people pleaser with a brimming candy jar on her desk. Don't go near her between 3 and 4:30 P.M. "That's when blood sugar dips and resistance plummets," says Gullo, who recommends snacking on nonfat Greek

yogurt or a 95-calorie Chocolite bar. When cravings do strike, take a whiff of peppermint essential oil (SlimScents makes a scent "pen" for just that purpose); even toothpaste works in a pinch. People who sniffed peppermint regularly for a week consumed 23 percent fewer calories, according to one study.

Thanksgiving

The rule is that one day of eating poorly won't hurt you,

but Thanksgiving might be the exception: The average woman, whose daily caloric intake should be around 2,000 calories, wolfs down more than 4,500 calories and 229 grams of fat—and that's at Thanksgiving dinner alone. So even if you indulge for the day, aim to create a caloric deficit in advance. Starting on November 1, "cut 100 to 300 calories each day, so you have extra calories to play with," says nutritionist Lindsey Duncan. It can be as painless as eliminating a slice of cheese from your sandwich or forgoing an afternoon latte.

Then know that you don't have to resort to a grim feast of fat-free stuffing, Tofurky, and artificially sweetened pumpkin pie. "Allow yourself to splurge on the real things," says Gullo. "But watch your portion sizes, and control yourself before and after the meal." If you're going to be cooking (or wandering through the kitchen), resist the urge to sample. One study found that 9 percent of Thanksgiving calories are consumed in snack form before the actual meal. "It's not a good idea to cook on an empty stomach, or you'll nibble the whole time," says Gullo. "Start cooking right after breakfast, when you're not hungry." Popping a Listerine strip or a piece of gum also keeps your mouth occupied and discourages picking.

That's not to say you should fast all day—you'll run the risk of bingeing later on. Instead, start off with a filling, low-calorie breakfast, such as an egg-white omelet, says Gullo. At dinner, serve yourself a little of everything and don't go back for seconds. "The first bite of whatever tempts you is always the best," says Fernstrom.

As for leftovers, remember: Vats of mashed potatoes and pecan pie can turn a one-time indulgence into a week's worth of excess. So be ruthless: "Keep



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the vegetables and turkey to eat with greens,” says Ashley Borden, a personal trainer in Los Angeles. “Toss the heavy, fatty dishes and rich desserts.”

Holiday Parties

December is a bacchanal—and we wouldn’t have it any other way. But champagne glasses have a way of replenishing themselves, and hors d’oeuvres are tiny caloric bombs. As with Thanksgiving, trimming 100 to 300 calories each day will pay off when it’s time to get dressed for those

parties, because even the clothes you choose can have an effect: “A tight dress will alert you when you’ve eaten too much, and also helps you feel good about yourself—like your body is worth protecting, not trashing,” says Gullo.

Once you’re at a party, it’s time to put your game face on. “Most hors d’oeuvres are about 100 calories per bite, which doesn’t seem bad until you realize you’ve consumed hundreds of calories and still feel hungry,” says Slayton. Skip anything light brown, which usually means it’s fried. Go for brightly colored foods like

vegetables or salmon, which are low in calories and high in antioxidants, or lean protein such as chicken satay (minus the peanut sauce), says Borden. Gullo also advises cutting yourself off after two cocktails, because more will stimulate your appetite, and weakened resolve is the last thing you need. Instead, alternate alcohol with sparkling water—carbonation tricks the stomach into feeling full.

And though most health experts tout the benefits of wine, watch out: “White wine goes down like water, so people overdrink it,” says Gullo. “Order something you don’t love, such as scotch, because you’ll sip it slowly, consuming fewer calories.” Another good option is a martini with extra olives. “It’s only 175 calories, and the olives will satisfy your urge to snack,” says Duncan. Avoid drinks with tonic or fruity mixers: Sweet martinis can easily top 300 calories apiece, and tonic has as much sugar as Coke. And do we even need to tell you to step far, far away from anything with a cutesy name like “Candy-Cane Cosmo”?

If there’s a buffet, beware: People tend to help themselves to twice the amount they would if the meal were served. Duncan recommends filling two-thirds of the plate with vegetables and protein such as shrimp, “so there’s less room for cheese, bread, and desserts.”

Lastly, as you mill around making small talk while declining the cheese puffs, remember not to be a martyr—or a buzzkill: Just as politics and religion are taboo party topics, so is your diet. “Don’t call attention to your lack of eating or announce every healthy choice you’re making,” says Fernstrom. “It makes people uncomfortable—and they’ll probably just try to force you to eat.”

—REPORTING BY SARAH Z. WEXLER

Tastes Great, Less Filling

There’s a smart way to enjoy holiday foods. Nutritionist Lauren Slayton offers alternatives that won’t leave you feeling deprived.

HALLOWEEN



HEAVY: Almond Joy (three minis). 200 calories, 11 g fat



LIGHT: 3 Musketeers (four minis). 97 calories, 3 g fat



HEAVY: Classic stuffing (½ cup). 410 calories, 29 g fat



LIGHT: Baked sweet potato. 103 calories, .17 g fat



HEAVY: Mini crab cake. 160 calories, 10 g fat



LIGHT: Prosciutto-wrapped asparagus. 60 calories, 4 g fat