

# Maintaining a healthy lifestyle during the holidays

The holidays are upon us. As the saying goes, 'tis the season to eat, drink and be merry. For many families, that means overloading on savory meals and tasty treats and not just during the holiday itself, but all season long.

Unfortunately, more than just Santa Claus sees us as we use the holidays as an excuse to abandon good eating habits. Our children are watching us too, and they're looking up to us—even as we unbutton the slacks to make room for that last slice of pumpkin pie.

"Indulging every once in a while won't hurt," said Kate Miccuci, a registered dietitian with the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "However, parents have to remember that they are their children's role models." If kids don't see healthy behaviors modeled by their family members, they are less likely to make good choices and lead healthy lifestyles themselves.

"There are two recommendations I offer to help families make it through the holidays without packing on extra pounds," said Micucci. "First, do not skip meals before special occasions, and second, maintain a healthy environment at home." Eating well-balanced meals and avoiding the urge to try to "cut calories" by skipping meals will help prevent over-eating during the holidays.

Continue to provide a balance of fruits and vegetables, in addition to those holiday hams, baked goods and sugary sweets. Remember to keep portions in line and be a good role model by talking to your children about your feeling of fullness. You might say, "This is delicious, but I'm full, so I'm going to stop eating." Don't force your children to clean their plates. That only teaches them to override feelings of fullness.

It's important to teach kids that tasty food is just one aspect of special occasions. The most important part of the holidays is to spend time with family and friends and to celebrate the religious or cultural significance of the occasion. Plan activities as a family and start your own traditions or continue traditions that do not involve food, such as going on a long walk together,



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playing board games or attending a holiday show.

If you are visiting relatives who do not share such a healthy view of the holidays, set aside time to venture out together as a family and take part in your personal, non-food-oriented traditions. Offer to help with grocery shopping and food preparation and dish up a healthy vegetable dish or fruit salad.

By eating a balance of healthy foods and holiday goodies, watching portion sizes and encouraging active traditions that do not involve food, you will send the right message to your kids during the holidays.

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Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.