Hints for holiday stomach stuffers [1]

Dear Alice,

I was wondering if you could offer any advice as to how to keep from getting that miserable full feeling after eating a big holiday meal. Are there any food combinations it would be best to avoid to keep you from feeling so miserable?

Thanks, Stuffed

Answer

Dear Stuffed,

Put down your fork and raise your glass. Here’s to feasting sensibly, moderately, and contentedly:

Before the meal:

- Eat your regular daily meals rather than skipping to save room for a big holiday meal. Being overly hungry is a potential recipe for too much holiday cheer. Instead, eat a snack before you head out (vegetables or a piece of fruit are good options) so you will be less likely to overeat when you arrive.
- If you need to bring a food to share, bring a healthier option. You can also try using ingredient substitutions [2] to reduce the fat, sugar, salt, and calorie content of some of your favorite holiday recipes.

As you’re deciding what to put on your plate:

- Focus more on the people, less on the fare. Try to spend time talking with other guests. Play a game, go for a walk, or try to engage in other activities that are not focused on eating.
- Take a moment to think about the food options in front of you before deciding what to put on your plate. For example, if you choose stuffing and mashed potatoes, consider balancing your meal with some veggies instead of grabbing a roll with butter.
- Foods that are high in fat make us feel full. If your holiday table is filled with fried foods or dishes with rich sauces, enjoy a limited amount of these. If the meal is served family style (passed around the table in serving dishes), it’s fine to decline some items. For
items you do select, take portions that are the amount you usually eat. Many people pile up their plates, and then feel obliged to eat everything.

- If the holiday meal is served buffet-style, check out all the offerings before getting in line. You can avoid overloading your plate by taking only the items you really want to eat. Buffets are invitations for over-sampling the savories and sweets.
- If it's appropriate to do so, get up between courses. An extra pair of hands clearing the table is often appreciated and will give you a chance to digest.

Some food for thought while you chew:

- It can take 20 minutes or more to feel full. During the meal, eat slowly, chew thoroughly, chat with your neighbors, and sip water regularly to let your brain catch up with your stomach and register your fullness. Check in with yourself to see how you’re feeling. Are you starting to get satiated? Try to become more in tune with your fullness cues and listen to them.
- Watch out for the effects of alcohol. It increases one’s appetite, setting the stage for overeating (it is also high in calories).

Actions to take after the holiday repast:

- Take a stroll after the meal to get some exercise and help the food settle in your stomach.

Enjoying the holiday season doesn't have to mean overindulging in holiday cheer. Being mindful of your eating (and drinking) doesn't have to be limiting; it can actually enhance your experience.

Happy Holidays!

Alice!

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