



Diabetes-friendly Holiday Survival Tips

San Mateo County Employee Health & Fitness Program

November 2004

The ‘Bah Humbug’ vs. Plan Approach

People with diabetes have *two* obstacles to overcome with the approaching holidays: preventing the dreaded 2 - 5 pound “holiday” weight gain, and preventing an overall increase in blood glucose.

You *can* survive the next few months and even use this challenging time to establish an eating and exercise plan that can launch you into a healthy New Year. Rather than approach the holidays with a “bah humbug” attitude, try to incorporate some practical holiday tips into your family and social festivities.

Remember Basic Diabetes Food Goals

Before we talk about Holiday Survival Tips, let’s review a few of the basic nutrition and food goals for people with diabetes.

- ❖ Have frequent meals and snacks, spreading your food intake throughout the day rather than in one or two large meals;
- ❖ Carbohydrates can be part of all meals and snacks if consumed in moderation, and along with foods that contain protein and/or fat;

- ❖ Concentrated sweets and sugary items should be minimized. When you do indulge, decrease or eliminate other high-carbohydrate foods to compensate.

It’s important to keep these goals in mind as we offer some strategies and tips to successfully manage the holiday season AND manage your diabetes!

Plan Around Parties and Meals

Do you dread some of the social aspects of the holidays because they all involve food? If so, it’s time to change that “bah humbug” attitude into a Positive Plan for Action. Here are some diabetes-savvy ideas for parties and dinners ~ whether you’re a guest or a host!

- ❖ **Keep a Calendar.** Write all of your parties, dinners and potlucks on your calendar so that you know well in advance when a special event is approaching. As you write each date and time, list two things that you can do that day to “offset” the event – in other words, create a Positive Plan for Action! For example, if December 14th is your office potluck lunch, consider taking a walk that morning before work or during the morning break to “offset” your extra nibbling at lunchtime. Your second plan of action might be to bring your Glucometer to work and test your

blood glucose one hour after the potluck. Research shows that people often eat less when they know that they will be testing their blood glucose afterwards – resulting in lower blood glucose readings!

Bottom line: use your calendar to book the social event *and* make plans to successfully manage it from the start!

❖ **Bring a Healthy Dish.** If you're traveling to a friend or family member's home for a holiday meal, resist the urge to bring a "treat" and instead make something healthy that you know will be enjoyed by all. The holidays are a time to indulge, but there'll be plenty of opportunity to do so without contributing more! The whole thought process that goes into preparing a diabetes-savvy dish (from recipe selection to presentation to your host) puts you in charge of your eating and empowers you to continue making healthy choices.

As a host, consider serving or having available one or more diabetes-friendly dishes for your guests. See our "Web Resources" at the end for some ideas!

❖ **Watch Your Food (and Bar) Proximity.**

It's true: the closer you are to food and drinks, the more likely you are to partake! If you find yourself socializing near the appetizer table, politely suggest moving the conversation further away – out of arm's reach or further! If need be, blame it on noise, a nearby loud talker or the room temperature! Either way, it will help you keep your "mindless munching" to a controllable minimum. Practice this same effective strategy if you find that standing near the bar causes you to drink faster and / or order more drinks. As the saying goes: everything in moderation!

❖ **Don't Let the Host See You "Empty".**

Hosts love to feed their guests. If one sees you with an empty plate or an unfilled glass, he or she will be the first to offer you more! It's hard enough to say "no", so why not look as though you have plenty left to eat! How? Put food on your plate that you don't intend to eat OR place a napkin over your plate (it's the universal sign for "I'm done eating"!) The same thing can be done with beverages. Once you've had your limit, ask the bartender to fill your glass with

water or diet soda so that you have *something* to sip should the host come by. It's easier to say "no" when you look like you already have what you need / want!

As a host, be sensitive to food issues for your guests, especially during this high-calorie season. Don't pressure guests to overeat or drink! Keep plenty of low-calorie food and beverage choices available for your guests.

'Tis Better to Give than Receive

Another common challenge of the holidays is the gift of goodies from your coworkers, neighbors and friends. Here are some practical tips for moderating your intake of these sweets.

❖ **Re-Gift Treats and Spread the Cheer.**

Although this thought might make you uncomfortable, consider the alternative to *not* re-gift sweets. There are few options: you can throw them out or you can keep them and eat them all. If neither option sounds very good to you, then get more comfortable with the idea of re-gifting. The goal is to remove the treats (and the temptation) from your house or office. Mix and match with other items you have, add a nice note, ribbon or bow, and voila!

❖ **Wrap It and Freeze It.** If the thought of getting rid of holiday treats is just too unbearable to consider, then make them less accessible by freezing them. Buy extra Tupperware so that you can quickly go from "thank you" to the freezer. Defrost in moderation throughout the year and enjoy!

❖ **Pick Your *One* Passion.** Another option for holiday goodies is to pick just one "must have" from the plate or box of goodies that arrives on your desk or doorstep. For example, if you get a box of chocolates from your neighbor, pick which ones are your favorites and enjoy them within the guidelines of your diabetes meal plan. If chocolate caramels are your favorites, take the two or three that are in the box and set them aside. Wrap the rest to re-gift or share with friends, family or co-workers. The excess sugar is out of sight, out of mind and out of your blood stream!

❖ **Just Say "No Thanks" Ahead of Time."**

You may ultimately decide that it's better to tell friends, family members and co-workers before

the holiday season that lots of sweets and treats are delicious but difficult to enjoy within your diabetes meal plan. That one announcement should help reduce (but probably not eliminate) the amount of sweets you receive.

Baking – Visions of Sugar Plums...

A third challenge of the holidays is the baking of traditional cakes, cookies or sweets that may be a part of your family's celebration. Certainly these traditions can fit into a healthy diabetic's holiday plan. The following strategies will make it easier to do so!

❖ **Never Bake on an Empty Stomach.**

Always begin your holiday baking after a comfortable, complete meal so that you are full when you start cooking. The temptation to nibble or eat while working in the kitchen is much easier to overcome if you are not hungry.

❖ **Open the Windows.** The intoxicating aroma of delicious, freshly baked goods is enough to make almost anyone succumb and "sample" a sweet or two or three. Set yourself up for success by opening the window(s) while you bake, thereby reducing smells and the likelihood of nibbling or sampling.

❖ **Brush and Floss Your Teeth.** As silly as this sounds, most people say that the act of flossing and brushing their teeth keeps them from eating because of the effort it took to clean their teeth in the first place! Attempting this trick certainly can't hurt, since most of us don't floss often enough anyway!

❖ **Plan to "Splurge".** If you *know* you're going to eat some of the treats you've baked, then set yourself up for success and plan to eat them afterwards *in a controlled, enjoyable setting!* After the baking is finished and the dishes are done, sit down with a napkin on your lap, with the treats on a plate, and enjoy the fruits (or sweets!) of your labor. Splurging in this fashion sets you up to be in control and to enjoy rather than "sneaking" bites with your fingers in the batter!

'Tis the Season to stay ACTIVE

Even if your holiday eating is a bit of a challenge this year, there is always something that can help counteract it – physical activity!

Food will always raise blood sugars but physical activity is one of the few things that we can do to lower it. Use these tips below to try and get a bit more activity this holiday season.

❖ **Make Physical Activity "Appointments".** One of the best ways to fit in physical activity is to treat your walks or trips to the gym like they are unbreakable appointments. If you treat your exercise time like a work or family commitment, you will probably be less likely to skip it. Pen dates/times in your weekly calendar so that you have a plan to accomplish them.

❖ **Ask a Friend or Co-worker to Join You.** Research shows that people are more likely to stick with a physical activity plan if they share it with a friend, coworker, loved one or personal trainer. If you're struggling going solo, reach out to someone and try the buddy system!

❖ **Take Advantage of Spare Time.** There is no longer an "ideal" amount of time that you have to exercise in order to see benefits. *Any* 10 minutes you have to be active is 10 minutes well spent. Consider getting out of the car and walking the block while you wait to pick up your child from school or practice. Or, if your doctor's office is running a bit late, tell them you're heading out for a quick walk and will check back in 15 minutes. Exercise doesn't necessarily have to add time to your busy day or week, but you may need rethink your "down time" and create ways to work it in.

❖ **Plan It Before a Shower.** On the weekends and during the holiday days at home, fit in your activity time prior to showering and/or dressing for the day. Most people are less likely to exercise afterwards because they don't want to take the additional time to get cleaned and dressed again. If this situation holds true for you, you *have* to schedule your physical activity in the morning hours, otherwise it won't happen.

For more information:

Employee Health & Fitness Program
<http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/eps/hf>

Web Resources: Great Places to Get Diabetes-savvy Holiday Recipes & Holiday Survival Tips

Click on the following sites and plug in the search words “holiday meal planning” or “holiday eating”:

- ❖ American Dietetic Association - www.eatright.org
- ❖ American Diabetes Association - www.diabetes.org
- ❖ Temple University Health System www.temple.edu

Diabetes Management ~ Dec '04

This class consists of two information-packed sessions, each 4 ½ hours long, taught by Registered Dietitian, Toni Bloom, MS, RD. The first class covers the types of Diabetes, complications, medications and lab tests. The second class is devoted to nutrition management, meal planning and carbohydrate counting.

Redwood City:
Dec 9 & 16
8am – 12:30pm
455 County Ctr
Room 501

San Mateo:
Dec 7 & 14
8am – 12:30pm
222 W. 39th Ave
Classroom 1

Pre-registration required: call (408) 808-1333 or email toni@tonibloom.com. Class is conducted on County time with your supervisor's approval.

Diabetes Cooking Demonstration ~ Jan '05

Start the New Year by attending this cooking demonstration led by dietitian and diabetes educator Carolyn McCune. She'll be sharing tips for quick and healthy diabetes meal preparation and offering you samples of recipes prepared in class.

Redwood City:
January 26, 2005
12noon – 1:30pm
455 County Ctr, Room 101

Class is limited to 30 people and pre-registration is required: Call (408) 808-1333 or Email toni@tonibloom.com. Class is conducted on County time with your supervisor's approval.

Weight Watchers at Work

Weekly “Weight Watchers at Work” classes are currently offered in Belmont (Harbor Blvd), Menlo Park (Willow Clinic), Redwood City (Gov't Center), and San Mateo (Health Dept).

For class schedules and reimbursement information, go to www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/eps/hf

Individual Nutrition Counseling

Email our registered dietitian Toni Bloom at toni@tonibloom.com for information about her nutrition counseling services at County discounted rates. Whether you need help setting up a weight loss plan or need to better understand carbohydrates and blood sugar, she's a great coach! Counseling services are also available to family members.

HEAR²T Program

<https://www.stanfordheart.net/online/smc>

There is a strong link between heart disease and Diabetes. Employees with Diabetes are automatically eligible to receive confidential health & nutrition counseling services FREE of charge. Visit its confidential website and complete the health questionnaire. You'll be contacted by the Nurse Coordinator to determine your interest.

For more information:
Employee Health & Fitness Program
www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/eps/hf