

HealthTalk: Portion Control at Holiday Parties

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Q: How can I avoid overeating in response to people pushing food at me during family gatherings?

A: Family dynamics vary, so an approach that works in one family might not do well in another. Is your family one in which eating rich foods in large amounts is seen as an essential part of gatherings, and not doing so is met with resistance? Rather than making a major statement that you don't want to eat that way, you might try to let your healthy eating quietly fly under the radar. Especially if you are busy helping, or not sitting right next to the person most likely to push food at you, your lack of overeating may go undetected if you don't make a big deal of it. If people do urge you to take more than you are comfortable eating, try for responses that don't put them on the defensive. You might compliment the food and say that you are so full you'd like to wait until later for more. If you refuse in a way that makes others feel guilty by implying that they are eating excessively, or that the food they have served you is unhealthy, they may be offended and push further. Remember that the health impact of a food varies with its portion. If you help with serving, you can choose the portion that's right for you. Try to find some vegetables or other healthful choices to savor slowly, so that if others are going back for third or fourth portions, you still have something to munch. Don't let other people derail your efforts to take care of your health. Nevertheless, try to be sensitive when you are dealing with people for whom you know refusing food feels like you are refusing their love.

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