

## 7 Tips to Kick-Start Healthy Eating Habits after the Holidays

Source: [SunLife](#)

Ready to bounce back from your holiday food hangover? A nutrition expert weighs in on how to develop a healthy attitude about eating in the New Year.

The holidays might not be the healthiest time of year, but there's no shame in reveling in a season full of indulgences – especially if they come in the form of herb-glazed turkey, rich and buttery shortbread cookies or eggnog with a kick. But with the festive season done with and a New Year beginning, you may be looking to jumpstart your January with better eating habits.

Toronto-based dietitian Shahzadi Devje, RD, CDE, MSc, offers these healthy eating tips if you're aiming to keep your New Year's resolutions or recovering from a few too many of those holiday indulgences:

### 1. Don't feel guilty about holiday eating

One of the best things about a New Year is that it lets you put the past behind you and look forward to a better future. Take the same approach to your eating habits. "Avoid feeling guilty and beating yourself up about overdoing it during the holidays," says Devje. "It's better to have those moments where you enjoy foods – ones that you don't regularly get to eat – with your loved ones. After the holidays, you can take time to focus on how to get back to your normal or healthier pattern of eating."

If the holidays have left you in a state of sluggishness and digestive distress, Devje suggests drinking plenty of water to help hydrate your body and fight fatigue. "You could also consider drinking green smoothies to boost your intake of vitamins, minerals and fiber."

### 2. Be wary of health hype

With so many people making healthy resolutions for the New Year, you may find yourself bombarded with nutritional messages and promotions for everything from the latest diet for radical results to a list of the "worst" foods to avoid. "When it comes to your body and diet, I would encourage people to steer clear of messages that advocate extremism of any sort," says Devje.

"In this era of instant gratification, we're always on the hunt for quick-fix solutions. But falling for sensationalized messages that demonize or obsess over certain foods and nutrients is not the way to long-lasting, healthy habits," she says. "Not to mention, they can induce feelings of guilt and shame, and even hinder the pleasure of eating."

So, how do we form these lifelong, healthy eating habits? A lot of it has to do with finding your motivation to live a healthier life and practicing mindful eating.

### **3. Ask yourself what motivates you to make healthier choices**

“I think the New Year offers an opportunity to step back and reflect on what it means to be healthy. And that’s different for everyone,” says Devje. So ask yourself why you want to eat healthy. What’s your motivation? Are you eating better to get past your post-holiday slump? Is it to improve your overall health? Boost your energy levels? Avoid health problems down the road, like diabetes? “Whatever your reasons may be, let them inspire your journey and fuel your commitment.”

### **4. Practice mindful eating**

There’s so much more to mindful eating than just eating slowly. It also means being aware of the nutritional benefits you’re gaining from your meals and knowing how your body responds to certain foods. For instance, you may find that some vegetables and legumes make you feel energetic, full and satisfied, while others leave you feeling bloated and uncomfortable. Knowing your body’s reaction to specific foods and ingredients will make it easier for you to plan meals with nutrient-dense foods you love.

Do you find yourself multitasking by eating at your desk? This can sometimes lead to mindless eating, as your attention isn’t on what you’re eating, why you’re eating it and when you feel full. If you lead a busy life, it might be difficult to practice mindful eating all the time. But you can start by setting aside one mealtime – whether it’s by yourself or with your friends and family – to sit down and enjoy your food without distractions. “Mindful eating means eating with attention and intention, instead of rushing through meals distracted,” says Devje. “It can help you establish and strengthen healthy eating habits for the long haul.”

### **5. Start with small, realistic health goals**

Take small steps to improve your eating habits. This could be any one of cutting back on fried foods, replacing sugary snacks with fresh fruits and veggies, upping your daily water intake or starting your morning with a healthy breakfast. “Small successes will boost your motivation and keep you going,” says Devje. When you’ve accomplished one small step, add another.

As you gradually stretch these small steps out into long-term health goals, you should also remember to be flexible in your approach. “This means if it doesn’t work out one day, don’t fret,” she says. It’s okay if your eating habits aren’t always healthy or perfect. “Setbacks are normal and you can learn from them to move forward. It’s important to practice positive self-talk and be kind to yourself.”

### **6. Stock your fridge with nutrient-rich foods**

“Try eating more plant-based foods and incorporate a variety of wholesome and colourful foods (fruits and vegetables),” Devje suggests. “These are basic principles that we can all follow. Not to mention, this eating pattern has passed the test of time and has consistently shown to promote good health and longevity.”

Stock your fridge and pantry with nourishing produce, so it's visible to grab and enjoy. If you already incorporate various greens, grains, beans, nuts and fruits into your meals, then you're off to a great start. But you don't have to toss out any leftover delicacies you may still have from the holidays. Maybe you've got some stuffing or pie hanging around in your freezer that you don't want to waste. "It's absolutely okay to have a treat now and then," says Devje. "But don't think of it as a cheat day. It's just a normal day." (And be sure not to keep anything past its best-by date.)

## **7. Get creative in the kitchen**

Now's the time to spark your creativity in the kitchen and try new things. For example, if you love mac and cheese, you could try making your own dairy-free cheese sauce with ingredients like potatoes, carrots, cashews, olive oil, nutritional yeast and soy milk. Or, if you have a sweet tooth, you can blend chickpeas, nut butter and honey in a food processor. Stir in some dark chocolate chips and you've got an egg-free, nutrient-packed cookie dough!

"Develop your cooking skills and learn new and simple recipes to add variety to your meals," says Devje. "This is key in keeping the momentum going throughout the year."