

## HEALTH & WELLNESS

# 7 Ways to Survive the Holidays When You Have Diabetes

From the decadent desserts to the workout-unfriendly weather, winter's a tough time to be dealing with diabetes. So we asked an expert for practical solutions to help keep your health in check—without having to skip the pecan pie.

By Barbara Brody, November 13, 2016

Pumpkin pie: Check.

Stuffing: Yes, please.

Football: Don't even think about turning off the TV!

It may be the most wonderful time of the year, but the holidays are also prime time for overeating and under-exercising. Let's be honest—when the weather cools, it's easy to hunker down on the couch and essentially forget about exercise. Meanwhile, a steady stream of parties and family gatherings provides a nonstop parade of decadent, sugary treats.

That's problematic for just about anyone who's concerned about their health—but it's especially challenging if you have type 2 diabetes.

Running the (Diabetes) Numbers: 4 People Share How a Type 2 Diagnosis Helped Them Take Charge of Their Health

Making it from Thanksgiving to New Year's without gaining weight or letting your blood sugar get too high isn't easy, but it *is* possible, says John E. Anderson, M.D., an internist at the Frist Clinic in Nashville and past President, Medicine and Science, of the [American Diabetes Association](#).

Just follow these seven smart strategies.

1.

## Predict—and Prepare





First, some tough love: "This season comes around every year; it didn't sneak up on you!" Dr. Anderson says.

Point being, when you know in advance what curveballs are coming, you can figure out how to avoid (or at least manage) them.

For example, physical activity is crucial for people with diabetes, since it can help keep both weight and blood sugar in check. But if you're someone who loves to play golf or walk outside, you need a plan B for when there's ice and snow on the ground.

"You should anticipate that it will be a cold, dark winter and have a game plan for how you'll exercise, whether you walk the stairs in your office building or take laps around the mall," Dr. Anderson suggests.

If you're going to be traveling, you should also take some time to plan accordingly. Be prepared, for instance, to treat hypoglycemic events with hard candy or glucose tablets.

Heading to the airport? It can be hard to find healthy food when you're on the go, so pack some snacks and remember to take all your meds and supplies, like your blood glucose meter, on board with you.

## 2.

### Be a Picky Eater







Some people think having diabetes means certain foods are totally off-limits. Not true, says Dr. Anderson.

"There's absolutely nothing that you can *never* eat," he explains. "But you need to pay attention to how much of the 'bad' stuff you're eating, and how often."

So go ahead and treat yourself to some candied yams or a slice of pecan pie if that's what you're craving—just keep portions of high-carb foods small. Consider making fresh fruit, vegetables and lean protein the stars of your dinner plate, and starchy side dishes or desserts the minor accompaniments.

And pace yourself: "Eating slowly helps you figure out if you're full," Dr. Anderson says. Be selective, too. If those dinner rolls look ho-hum, take a pass.

It can also help to focus on how your condition could be affected later by the combination of foods you're choosing now. Hint: If you're going to dig into something carb-heavy, make sure you have some lean protein and fiber to go with it.

And if you take insulin before meals, remember to adjust your dose accordingly.

### 3.

## Think Before You Drink



You probably know that soda, fruit punch and other sweet drinks can spike your blood sugar. But you should be wary about alcohol, too.

Yes, you can enjoy a drink or two, says Dr. Anderson, but understand that it might cause your blood sugar to rise and then crash hours later.

"Wine that you finished drinking at 10 P.M. might cause hypoglycemia at 2 A.M.," he warns. So if you're prone to lows, be sure to check your

blood sugar before bedtime.

Dr. Anderson also advises against drinking without eating; a glass of wine with dinner is a better idea than one sipped sans food. Prefer cocktails? Aim to avoid ones made with soda or fruit juice.

## 4.

### Stand Up to Food Pushers



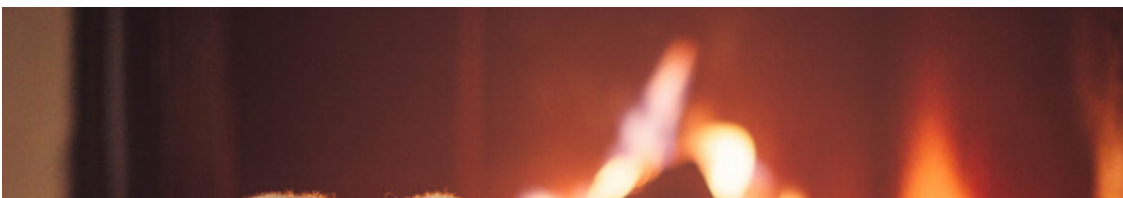
You know who they are—the aunt who tries to force-feed you her famous cheesecake, or the mom who shows her love through her homemade macaroni and cheese.

Sure, they mean well, but friends and family may end up urging you to eat things that you'd be better off skipping.

Dr. Anderson's advice: Take a bite of that casserole your grandmother is nagging you about, but just a bite. If a taste doesn't appease her, it's fair to remind her that it's not good for your health to overdo it.

## 5.

### Don't Forget About Your Feet





It's Christmas day, fat snowflakes are falling—and the whole family is going cross-country skiing. Such fun!

If you're prone to hypoglycemia, just be sure to carry a snack or glucose tabs with you. People with neuropathy (nerve damage) in their feet—a common condition among those who've had diabetes for a while—should take some extra precautions.

First, talk to your doctor to make sure it's OK to exercise outdoors in the winter. When you do go out, wear comfortable, supportive shoes with a cushioned sole, along with warm socks. And remember to check your feet every day for any ulcers or foreign objects, like pebbles, that could cut into them and cause an infection.

"If you have mild neuropathy, you might not feel them, and it just takes 30 seconds to check," Dr. Anderson adds.

## 6.

### Get Right Back on Track



You carefully planned out what you'd eat and what you wouldn't during Christmas dinner—and still went way off-course. But don't be too hard



on yourself. For one thing, it can be counterproductive.

"Don't say, 'OK, I've blown it, so I might as well just keep going,' " Dr. Anderson says. "There's nothing wrong with one big holiday meal, but try to make an extra effort to get back on track the next few days."

To help yourself course correct, try hitting the gym each day, and eat plenty of veggies and lean protein.

7.

Reconsider New Year’s Resolutions



They’re so inspiring to make ... and so easy to break. "Patients often come in with broad resolutions, like, 'This year I'm going to be healthier,' " Dr. Anderson notes. “What does that mean, exactly?”

Instead, he suggests pinpointing some concrete tweaks you plan to make in the coming months. “If you can say, 'I've made an appointment with an exercise physiologist, or on this date, my wife and I are going to throw out all the cookies,' that's better," he says.

Dr. Anderson also recommends thinking about how you'll realistically be able to stick to a certain goal long-term. Can you *honestly* swear you'll never eat sugar again? "New Year's doesn't last very long," he points out. "What happens in March?"

Making doable changes—like vowing to try unsweetened coffee or saving bagel breakfasts for weekends, not every day— is the key to feeling great with diabetes through the holidays ... and long after.

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