

# Taming the Stress Eater Inside

Rich, creamy egg nog. Buttery, sweet cookies. Cheesy, bubbly artichoke dip. These are but a few of today's seasonal temptations that dance in our heads. But wait! Add to the equation elbow-to-elbow mall crowds, unrealistic expectations of holiday bliss, and a jam-packed December schedule, and you have...a recipe for excessive stress, and a speedy abandonment of the best intentions to avoid over-indulging in tasty treats.

Anticipating the obstacles you are likely to meet may make them much more manageable.

Try to avoid "the trap" of self-imposed obligations such as baking or cooking more than you really need to, or crafting homemade holiday gifts for every friend and neighbor unless it's what *you* really want to do. The holidays are no fun if you're exhausted, crabby and anything but jolly. Stress also causes many people to reach for food as comfort.



Here are some tips to establish more realistic expectations and choreograph a holiday that makes everyone happy:

- If you usually bake 20 types of cookies, plan to bake five of a few favorites to preserve family traditions...and your sanity.
- Adapt your recipes, using healthy alternatives like fat-free evaporated milk, sugar-free gelatin, egg substitutes, reduced- or non-fat dairy products, and the new sugar "blends" (part sugar, part no-calorie sweetener) for baking.
- Satisfy your real hunger before you go to holiday parties. Have a beverage and a light meal before you attend holiday parties to avoid gobbling up goodies.

- Enjoy party fare in moderation. If you have a cup of egg nog or a glass of wine, follow it up with a large glass of water, diet soda, or fruit juice. Take a tiny sample of the foods that interest you, rather than a full portion. If you usually eat five cookies, take just one or two and wait to see if that satisfies your craving.
- Anticipate conflict and devise a plan to diffuse it. If your sister complains every year about the paper plates you use to save time on clean-up, set her place with your finest china – in the spirit of humor. If Uncle Ned drinks too much alcohol every year, plan to serve non-alcoholic wine, beer and a festive punch.
- Formally schedule a bit of exercise and relaxation into your calendar and take some time for yourself.
- Take your family along on a shopping trip to buy a few simple things for less-fortunate people who could really use them. Involve them all in the giving process, so they appreciate the receiving process a little more.
- If you reach for food during times of stress, think about what you might do instead of eating. A walk around the block or a soak in a hot tub with a cup of tea and a good book might be just the thing to tame the stress-eater inside.

