

# HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

with

# INTUITIVE EATING

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# Introduction

If eating becomes more stressful for you during holidays, you are not alone. While holidays are widely celebrated with food – and often an abundance of it – they take place within a world that has been invaded by diet culture. We may get a break from school or work for holidays, but we don't seem to get one from diet talk and negative messages about food, eating, and bodies that can make us feel bad about ourselves.

This guide will give you a break. It is designed to help you apply the ten principles of Intuitive Eating to holidays. Developed by registered dietitians Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, Intuitive Eating is an approach to cultivating health by listening to and honouring one's own body. You deserve freedom from negative thoughts and feelings that are keeping you from establishing peaceful relationships with food and your body and fully experiencing the joys of the holiday season. Know that depriving yourself and feeling guilty or ashamed about your food choices or body will harm your health more than a sugary dessert or day of overeating ever could.

Here's to joyful and healthy holidays with Intuitive Eating!

## Principle 1

# REJECT THE DIET MENTALITY

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Keep in mind that the pursuit of weight loss can cause real harm. Dieting keeps you from fully nourishing yourself and is a risk factor for the development of eating disorders. Avoid reading books, magazine articles, and blog posts that offer false hope that losing weight easily and permanently will be possible if you just follow *this* diet or exercise regimen. Talk yourself out of any plans to set a new year resolution to lose weight or change your body shape.

Try saying something like:

*"By switching from dieting to an eating approach in which being 'on track' does not involve any needless restriction, I won't have to worry about going 'off track' during the holidays."*

## Principle 2

# HONOUR YOUR HUNGER

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The human body is programmed to send signals indicating when it needs calories (energy) or food. Depriving it of adequate calories or food is likely to eventually lead to intense hunger and, in turn, to overeating. As reasonable as it might seem to eat sparingly to minimize your calorie intake in preparation for a big holiday meal so you don't end up consuming more than you deem acceptable, keep in mind that this tactic often backfires. Eat every three or four hours or so, and eat enough to quell your hunger, even if you will eat a large meal later in the day.

Try saying something like:

*"My body needs and deserves nourishment at regular intervals throughout the day."*

## Principle 3

# MAKE PEACE WITH FOOD

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There is no better time than during the holiday season to call a truce with food. Give yourself unconditional permission to eat – in other words, allow yourself to eat what and when you want to. All foods have value in some way. Forbidding yourself from eating particular foods can result in feelings of deprivation that escalate until you are overwhelmed by cravings. When you can no longer resist those cravings, you may end up eating in a way that feels out of control. Think of the foods that are meaningful to you during the holiday season. Perhaps they are high in sugar or fat (or both) – but tell yourself that you may eat them without having to “earn” permission to do so or to compensate afterwards.

Try saying something like:

*"The buffet-style dinner at grandma's house will be an opportunity to enjoy a wide variety of delicious foods, especially the ones that she only cooks during the holidays."*

## Principle 4

# CHALLENGE THE FOOD POLICE

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The Food Police – the voices that continually remind you that you must follow the rules of dieting and admonish you when you go astray – do not

have invitations to holiday events. Still, they somehow make their way in and judge others' food choices and eating behaviours. Take a stand. You have the right to let the Food Police know that they are not welcome. Assert that you know what your body and mind need and that you will make food choices accordingly.

Try saying something like:

*"I'm working on eating in a balanced way. Eating these foods – not restricting them – will actually get me closer to that goal."*

## Principle 5

# RESPECT YOUR FULLNESS

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You will likely find yourself at a celebratory meal at which the food options are appetizing and plentiful. You may be put in a position in which you feel pressured to eat so as not to offend others. There is nothing wrong with overeating at a holiday meal. There is also nothing wrong with declining to eat any more once you feel comfortably satisfied. In any case, be kind to yourself. Whether you eat to the point of excessive fullness or decide that you will not cave into pressure to eat to please others, remind yourself that you have you have no reason to feel guilty or ashamed.

Try saying something like:

*"It's okay to eat – or turn down – an extra serving. Neither choice is wrong."*

## Principle 6

# DISCOVER THE SATISFACTION FACTOR

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Consider the foods that are especially meaningful to you during the holiday season. Remember that you have the right to nourish yourself unconditionally. You don't have to deprive yourself of a food that you love just because it is considered by some to be "unhealthy". Use all of your senses to notice and appreciate the various characteristics of the foods that you choose to eat. Your surroundings also play an important role in the satisfaction that you derive from eating. Even the simplest meal, if it takes place with loved ones in a warm, inviting setting, can be deeply satisfying.

Try saying something like:

*"I'm going to take the time I deserve to truly savour this meal."*

## Principle 7

# HONOUR YOUR FEELINGS WITHOUT USING FOOD

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For many people, holidays are times of increased emotional challenges. Holidays are typically busy periods, which can be stressful and overwhelming. They may involve having to see family members with whom you have strained relationships. They may also be times that bring about increased feelings of loneliness. Eating can be helpful in coping with difficult feelings. There is nothing wrong with turning to food for comfort. If eating is your *only* strategy for dealing with emotional challenges, however, it can be problematic. Eating doesn't address the source of these issues. Create a list of alternate ways of coping and pull it out as needed to remind yourself that you have choices.

Try saying something like:

*"Eating might only help me feel better for a short while. I will practice other ways of coping with these emotions."*

## Principle 8

# RESPECT YOUR BODY

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Keep in mind that human bodies all have value, regardless of their shape or size. Perhaps you are uncomfortable with your body right now. Even if this is the case, you can still respect it. Instead of criticizing your body's "flaws", think of the parts that you like or the wonderful things that your body can do. Instead of forcing yourself into an outfit for a holiday gathering with the intent of creating the illusion of a different body shape or size, choose clothing that fits you properly and feels comfortable. Spend time with people who help you think positively about your body and, if you can, avoid those who are disrespectful about it.

Try saying something like:

*"My body deserves to be treated with dignity, regardless of its shape or size."*

## Principle 9

# EXERCISE — FEEL THE DIFFERENCE

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With the holiday season tending to be a time of increased busyness, many people experience concerns about their "lack" of exercise as they stop going to the gym or engaging in structured physical activity sessions that last for a predetermined amount of time. What is often unrecognized is that

there are countless forms of exercise – many of which do not involve going to a gym or long bouts of physical activity. Consider how you can move your body in ways that you enjoy, even if only for short bursts spread across the day. Perhaps there will be fun holiday events in your community that will be opportunities for you not only to be physically active but also to socialize. Exercise with the intention of feeling refreshed. Focus on how your body responds to being active rather than on burning calories or exercising for a specific amount of time.

**Try saying something like:**

*"Exercise – in moderation – is beneficial for both my body and mind.*

*Movement does not need to be structured or high-intensity for it to 'count' as exercise."*

## *Principle 10*

# **HONOUR YOUR HEALTH WITH GENTLE NUTRITION**

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Rest assured that you will not become nutrient-deficient or develop chronic disease from one snack, meal, or day of eating that is not completely balanced. Even several consecutive days of unbalanced eating – which many people experience during the holiday season – will not ruin your health. Your eating pattern over an extended period of time is what really matters.

**Try saying something like:**

*"It's important to eat a wide variety of different foods to support my*

*health. Holiday foods – even the ones that are high in sugar and calories – can be part of this variety."*

# Your Personal Healthy Holidays Toolkit

It can be helpful to have a toolkit of coping strategies and skills to draw from when you are in an emotionally challenging situation. If you don't already have a variety of tools in your toolkit, take some time to consider what you can start filling it with.

What could you say to yourself when you are having unhelpful thoughts about food or your body?

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How could you respond to other people's diet talk or comments or questions pertaining to your food intake or body?

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What self-care activities could you engage in during the holidays?

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## Recommended Reading

Tribole, E., & Resch, E. (2012). *Intuitive Eating: A revolutionary program that works*. New York, NY: St. Martins Griffin.

Tribole, E., & Resch, E. (2017). *The Intuitive Eating workbook: Ten principles for nourishing a healthy relationship with food*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications Inc.

Your feedback will be welcomed!  
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