



Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black | plant-based nutrition for the whole family

Holiday Eating: Staying Plant-Based & Healthy During the Festive Season

Trying to stick to your healthy eating goals is difficult at the best of times. Add in the chaos and the ubiquitous availability of high fat and sugar laden treats associated with the holiday season, and most of us just throw in the towel as soon as the Christmas decorations come out at the craft store. You know, like June.

To make matters even more challenging, try sticking to a 100 percent plant-based diet during the holidays. I mean, you might as well just forget it, right? Does it sound like I'm doing a podcast on why you shouldn't even bother trying to be healthy during the holidays? I do consider myself a pragmatist.

Let's face it, most of us will not make it through to the end of the year without overindulging and gaining a few pounds. The diet and fitness industry is counting on it. I mean, that's how they sucker us into paying for that expensive gym membership in January after all. But there is hope. In this small bite episode... Ha!

You see what I did there? Small bite? In this small bite episode, I'm going to throw down some tips, tricks, and hacks to help you and your family get through the holidays without having to start the new year on Metformin. With the right mindset, preparation, and support, holiday challenges can be overcome, you know, at least most of the time... or well, maybe some of the time... But hey, if I save you from even one sugary, high fat, diabetes-inducing treat, I will consider this episode a success.

Welcome to Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black, Small Bite Edition. This podcast is all about supporting families in their efforts to give their children a solid foundation of healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime. I'm your host, Dr. Angela Black. I'm a board-certified pediatrician with over 20 years of experience.

I'm passionate about using evidence-based guidelines to teach my patients and their parents how to prevent chronic diseases for a lifetime of health. In today's episode of Eat Your Greens, we're just taking a small bite. Small bite episodes give you the opportunity to get advice direct from a pediatrician in 10 minutes or less.

I'll serve up a snack size answer to some of the most common questions I get asked in the office. Don't forget that this podcast offers general health information about nutrition and feeding of infants and children. It's meant for educational purposes



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only and is not intended to replace the important relationship between a parent, child, and pediatrician.

If you have concerns about your child's nutrition, health, or growth, please consult your doctor. For more episodes, or if you would like more information about child nutrition and feeding, please visit www.eatgreenswithdrblack.com.

Welcome to Episode 5 of Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black. Where I practice medicine in my office, the parade of treats starts as early as September. This is because we have Sonia who makes the best birthday treats and September happens to be the month with the highest birth rate. So, starting in September and carrying through into October, we get some kind of yummy, delicious birthday cake almost every week, sometimes more than once a week.

Then we get to the end of October and it's Halloween. And that's, you know, basically the kickoff for the holiday season, because Halloween's the last day of October. Then we're into November, it's Thanksgiving, and then Christmas, and the desserts don't stop coming until New Year's. So really, if you think about it, if you work in my office, we have like a three month stretch - that's a quarter of the entire year - with an abundance of opportunities to pig out almost every day of the week.

Going plant based has helped me avoid a lot of it, but I'm still tempted occasionally when my old favorites are available. For example: Sonia's death by chocolate. I mean this could be called death by dairy really, but it is so delicious and really hard to avoid. I basically try not to set foot in the break room if I know she made a death by chocolate.

So, let's talk about how to get through this hedonistic time of year without diving headfirst right into the gravy bowl.

First things first, try to set some goals. Reflect on the priority you place on your health and your kids' and your family's health. Think about the long-term. What kind of traditions and habits do you want to establish for your children's lifetime? How do you want to set the example for them so that they can be their healthiest?

You've heard me say it before, and you'll hear me say it a lot throughout this entire podcast series: Make a plan. I'm all about planning. Make a plan for how you're



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going to stay true to your health goals. Talk to your family in advance, and don't forget to include any kids that are old enough to understand.

Talk to them about the health goals, and come up with a strategy together. But let's be realistic. It's really what you do most of the time that matters. A little flexibility is going to go a long way to ensuring that everyone enjoys the spirit of the season, rather than feeling like they're being punished or maybe ostracized from their peer groups.

Being overly restrictive or rigid almost always backfires. Unless there are medical reasons why you or your children have to avoid certain foods, allow them some flexibility. They're going to be exposed to plenty of sweets and other unhealthy foods at school. So, talk to them in advance about how we make good choices, set the example, but don't punish them for joining in with their peers.

Get them involved in the menu planning process. Let them help prepare the meals. Kids are technological geniuses, so let them surf the internet for healthy holiday treats that everyone can enjoy together. You can find lots of ideas for making healthier versions of the traditional foods that you've always enjoyed.

The idea is to ensure that what is eaten on most days is extra healthy and that's going to accommodate for the classroom parties and the social events. That way you don't have to succumb to feelings of guilt and self-judgment and, you know, what most of us do the first time we have that slice of pumpkin pie is we just give up entirely for the entire rest of the holiday season.

If you know that you're going to be attending some kind of a party, if it's the big holiday day or there's some other event where lots of treats and high fat food are going to be offered, try to make sure that everyone eats a healthy and filling breakfast in the morning and also at lunchtime. That way you're not starving by the time the party comes around.

Consider bringing a healthy dish to the event. I'm sure that other people will also appreciate the availability of a healthier option so that they too can stick to their goals. When sizing up the buffet table, try to walk around first. Pick a smaller plate if one's available. Start with the healthy, higher fiber foods that are going to fill you up first, and then start adding in small portions of those indulgences - the things with more fat or sugar, that you know you want to try and then you won't overdo it. Don't forget to limit alcohol intake and avoid becoming intoxicated. Not only does



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alcohol come with a ton of calories, but when we drink a little too much, we are more likely to make decisions that we'll regret later.

Try slowing down and eating mindfully. Savor every bite. Pay attention to the flavor, the aroma, the texture. Not only does this make everything more enjoyable, but it sends a message to your brain that you've eaten, so that you recognize when you've had enough and you're able to stop before you overeat. As I said before, it's really about what you do most of the time. Try to work to eat healthy on the regular days and save those special treats for the big events.

Try to set yourself up for success by avoiding temptation in the first place. For example, I try to go home for lunch or I bring something that doesn't need to be heated and that way I can avoid going into the break room in the first place. Also, I remind myself of the health benefits of sticking to my plant-based diet so I'm less tempted on those days.

When it comes to Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah - all the big days when we're going to sit down with our family - you can prepare plant-based meals without sacrificing flavor or tradition. In fact, this presents a great opportunity to develop your creativity. You can explore new and delicious recipes that everyone can enjoy.

These days, you can find an abundance of plant-based cookbooks and websites, social media accounts, things like that, that are dedicated to healthy plant-based cooking. So, there's no shortage of inspiration. Consider hosting your own holiday event, providing lots of fun, healthy plant based hors d'oeuvres and desserts for others to enjoy.

There are also lots of ways to take your traditional meals that you grew up eating and love and make them a little healthier.

An important strategy for approaching the holiday season is to keep a positive mental attitude. Don't think of your healthy lifestyle as a punishment or set yourself up for isolation by not joining in on the festivities. Start by communicating with your friends and family so you can get them on your team.

It's important to develop a positive and resilient mindset. Instead of seeing your plant-based choices as restrictions, reframe them as a pathway to nourishment and



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vitality. Having that support system is critical. It not only keeps you accountable, but also motivated. So, surround yourself with positive influences.

This can be things like supportive friends and family, inspirational blogs and books, or an online plant-based community if you have access to one. Celebrate the progress that you make and the small victories along the way, and that'll help reinforce your commitment. It's no secret that the holidays tend to be one of the most stressful times of year.

It's well known that depression and anxiety rates tend to skyrocket at this time of year. Many of us tend to overeat when stressed, so it's extra important to be proactive and practice self-care. Part of stress management is time management. The holidays are hectic. We have our full-time jobs, we're already tired from working all day, but then we have to race around trying to get the shopping done.

The kids may have those Christmas pageants and recitals. Maybe you're traveling and you need to plan and pack, or you've been invited to several gatherings and parties. If you're like me and you're in healthcare, you know, it's also cold and flu season, one of the busiest times of year. And, uh, hooray, this year, I see that we may be in for another triple-demic winter, like last year.

You're probably already tired. And then you have all these extra obligations that come with this time of year. So be choosy. Don't overdo it. Most people will understand if you have to decline an invitation, just be honest with them. Delegate whenever possible when it comes to the errands and the shopping and all the extra things that get on our to do list, try to divide and conquer with your family when you are out shopping and running errands.

Plan ahead to avoid trips through the drive thru. Consider going back and listening to episode two of Eat Your Greens, where I talk about healthy eating while managing a busy schedule. For example, if you know that you're going to need to bring a dish to more than one party, make a double batch of the same thing and freeze the extra.

That way you have it to quickly defrost and bring for the next event. You can plan your menu in advance. You can plan your grocery list with a menu planning app. I like to use the Plan to Eat app. I've talked about it before. If you click on the link in my show notes and subscribe to the Plan to Eat app, you'll get a discount off of the subscription price.



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When it comes to managing your gift list: instead of trying to buy a separate and a unique gift for everyone, that requires driving to lots of different stores, consider doing something a little different, like, say, making a charitable donation in their name. I have a tradition that I've started at work where instead of buying separate gifts for everyone in my office, I make a donation to our local food bank. I also put a box in the break room and ask for donations so that way my colleagues and coworkers can also participate in this yearly charity drive.

The other thing I did last year was I bought these animal tracking bracelets from an organization called Fahlo (F. A. H. L. O.). With the purchase of the tracking bracelet, they make a donation to an organization that supports endangered species, and the recipient gets to “adopt” the animal. And they get access to an app that tracks the animal's movements.

You get to adopt things like elephants, whales, and polar bears and even sea turtles. So, this isn't necessarily about plant-based eating, but it does support the values of plant-based eating by supporting animal welfare. Everyone loved their bracelets. They were reasonably priced. And basically, I got to practice generosity and feel good about the gifts I was giving without having to spend lots of time and energy- and not to mention gas- driving all over town, finding presents. I will also include a link to the Fahlo organization. in my show notes.

Okay, so getting back to stress management. When you find yourself in stressful situations or when you're eating, I strongly recommend developing a practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is how we just take a moment and notice. Notice what's going on around us, but also within us. How are we feeling in the moment? How does our body feel? What's our emotional state? And You're not trying to do anything. You're not trying to change your emotional state. You're just noticing it, taking a moment to see what's going on.

This is a very powerful tool for stress reduction. And as I alluded to earlier, it's also really useful when it comes to eating. You know, you savor all your food, those nourishing plant based meals, and also the occasional holiday indulgence. That way you really enjoy them to the fullest and appreciate all of their qualities.

Whenever possible, take some time to relax. Engage in activities that bring joy and calmness, whether it's enjoying a quiet moment with a warm cup of tea, or taking a leisurely walk-in nature. You might try just taking even 15 minutes to read your



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favorite book. Whatever it is that you enjoy that will help you nurture your inner self. This is going to recharge your spirit and support your overall well-being.

Don't forget about physical activity. Not only is this going to be good for our health at a time of year when we're maybe eating more calories than we should, but it's really crucial for maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Find ways to incorporate movement into your daily routine. Take a walk at lunch or certainly after the big meal. Or, maybe when you have all your family around you have a dance party. Another good idea is to organize family activities for the big day. Develop some new healthy traditions like taking a holiday hike or maybe going on a camping trip instead of staying at home and eating and watching the game. You can go outside in the yard and play tag after the main meal. Be creative. There's lots of fun things to do that can really bring the family together in a healthy way.

So that brings us to the end of this small bite episode. Ho ho ho, or as I prefer to say, bah humbug. Like it or not, the holiday season is here and with it all of the potential for stress and overindulgence. But it is truly possible to participate in the festivities and traditions and to celebrate with friends and family without having to deviate from the healthy lifestyle goals that you've set for yourself and your family.

With a bit of planning and creativity, and a healthy dose of mindfulness, you can fully embrace the joy of the season.

Thanks for listening, and don't forget to eat your greens.