

Ross' Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter Issue #3 – 11/16/2006 – The Thanksgiving Edition

I hope you are all doing well and staying motivated to do your best during the holiday season. Since Thanksgiving is only a week away, I decided to dedicate this issue to the holiday that is virtually synonymous with food.

The biggest problem with Thanksgiving is not necessarily eating unhealthy foods, but rather eating way too much. It is estimated that many people eat more calories during a Thanksgiving meal than they should consume in 2 to 3 full days. Obviously, the key to Thanksgiving is portion control.

This issue's article will give specific advice about how to control portion sizes and prevent overeating, but I want to start with some general advice. This is one of the easiest things you can do to prepare for Thanksgiving, but it is also one of the most powerful pieces of advice I can give: **Do not approach Thanksgiving expecting to eat excessive amounts.** You may think this sounds too simple, but let me explain why it is so effective.

As you probably realize, your behavior/response to any situation is influenced by your expectations. Most people expect to overeat during Thanksgiving or in some cases even feel as though they are supposed to stuff themselves as much as possible during the holiday. In our society it is difficult to even think about Thanksgiving without conjuring images of sitting around a table feeling so full that you don't even want to move.

When people have the expectation that they will eat way more than they should, as typically happens during Thanksgiving, they end up believing it is a forgone conclusion that they will overeat. Sometimes when I hear people talk about Thanksgiving it sounds as though there is a magical power that forces them to eat too much. People often say things like, "Thanksgiving is coming up so I am going to stuff myself with turkey and pie." These types of statements suggest there is a cause and effect relationship where Thanksgiving causes people to overeat. Thanksgiving does not really hold special power over people's behavior, but their expectations concerning Thanksgiving certainly will affect how much they eat.

By expecting not to overeat on Thanksgiving, you are actively taking control of your behavior and acknowledging that you have the power to control how much you eat. I am not saying that if you expect not to overeat during Thanksgiving then all your problems will be solved, but it is a great start. Also, it creates the right mindset for employ the additional strategies discussed in the article below.

Before getting to the article however I want to address one more issue, the actual goals and expectations you should have for Thanksgiving. I want to make it clear that I do not want you to be highly restrictive with your eating (unless that is what makes you feel good). Instead I want you to enjoy the holiday while minimizing your overeating. If you are restricting yourself so much that you cannot have a good time and are stressing about making the right nutritional decisions, then you should allow yourself to cheat a little.

As for my personal approach, I generally eat very healthy, but there are occasions where I allow myself to eat things I would normally stay away from. These are usually holidays, birthdays, or other big social occasions. Instead of feeling bad about eating less healthy than usual, I view them as opportunities to try different foods (especially homemade or specialty foods) that I normally do not have access to. The most important thing for me is not to regret avoiding something I really would have enjoyed. Of course, after the special occasion I will go right back to my healthy eating habits.

I developed this approach after years of almost constant restriction. During this time I would always take my own food with me, even if I went out to eat with friends. After a while I realized that the mental stress from always trying to be good was having a more negative effect than I would get from eating some of the foods I was avoiding. Then I started letting myself cheat on occasion and it actually became easier to consistently eat healthy the rest of the time. The key for me was to find out how little I could cheat and still retain a positive attitude towards my healthy eating habits.

Each of you will find that certain eating styles or programs work better than others. Some of you may be fine with long periods of without any cheating, while other people do well with a small amount of cheating each day (e.g. a piece of chocolate). It is important to figure out what works best for you, because if you are not comfortable with your eating habits, it will be difficult to stay consistent and have long-term success.

Now we get to the article. The strategies discussed in this article should be used year round and not only on Thanksgiving. Some of the information will probably not even apply to Thanksgiving, but all of the information will be useful to help prevent overeating in certain circumstances.

Featured Article

Useful Strategies to Help Prevent Overeating

Overeating is certainly one of the greatest obstacles for people wanting to lose fat, get in shape, and improve their health. Eating too much can make it almost impossible to achieve your health and fitness goals, because any time you consume more calories than you burn, your body will be forced to store more fat. This will happen regardless of how healthy you are eating, so it is important to control portion sizes and avoid overeating as much as possible.

This article provides you with strategies to help prevent overeating in a variety of different situations. The strategies are broken into 3 sections based on the situation(s) where they are most useful. There are general strategies, which are useful all the time, strategies for eating at home, and strategies for dining out. There are of course other situations, such as eating on the go, but at least some of these strategies will apply to almost any situation you can think of.

Note: These strategies are written with the assumption that you are eating 5 or 6 small meals a day, as you should be doing, instead of 1 to 3 large meals.

GENERAL STRATEGIES TO PREVENT OVEREATING:

1. **Drink low calorie fluids (ideally water)** – Fluids help you feel full and decrease your hunger cravings. Drinking at least a glass or two of water during your meal will decrease the number of calories you can eat before you start feeling full. If this does not help much, you should also add an additional glass or two 20-30 minutes before the meal.
2. **Eat slowly** – Most people know they should eat slowly, but few people actually do. The most important to realize is that after you consume the necessary calories for your body to function, what I call being physiologically full, it can actually take around 20 minutes for your brain to process the information and let you know you have eaten enough. If you are eating slowly, the number of calories that you consume over what your body needs will be minimized, assuming you stop eating when you feel full.
3. **Eat as soon as possible after you start feeling hungry** – When you get hungry your body is telling you that it needs calories and you should eat. If you try to ignore your hunger, the feeling generally intensifies*. Increased hunger usually results in you eating more than you originally would have.

* You may be thinking that if you just hold out long enough your hunger will go away and you will not eat anything, thus lowering your caloric intake even more. I cannot stress how bad of an idea this is. I will not go into detail in this article, but I will say that continually ignoring your hunger and skipping meals will cause your metabolism to slow down dramatically. This is the main reason why there are so many people who eat minimal calories (less than 1000 per day) and still cannot lose weight. When you get hungry you should eat, just don't overeat.

STRATEGIES TO PREVENT OVEREATING AT HOME:

1. **Do not keep foods around that you frequently overeat** – This is common sense, but if you keep things at home that you typically stuff yourself with, you should not buy them. Using a little restraint at the grocery store means you won't have to restrain yourself as much at home.
2. **Don't eat out of a multiple serving bag/package** – People tend to eat certain foods out of the bag/package, such as chips or ice cream and this becomes even more troublesome when eating in front of the TV or during similar passive activities. During these instances there is usually no conscious thought about how much is being eaten and before you realize it, you have eaten the whole package or at least much more than you intended to. Instead, take out a small serving from the package and put it on a plate/bowl instead.
3. **Skip the seconds** – Having second servings at meals is not a good idea. I know some people believe that eating more is a compliment to the cook, but it is really not worth it. Instead of having seconds during the meal, have another serving for your next small meal 2-3 hours later. You can still express that the food was good while avoiding the negative effects of overeating. Also, it is a good idea to keep the prepared food away from your

eating space. Instead prepare your plate away from the table, before you sit down to eat, and you will not have the temptation for seconds right in front of you.

4. **Use Smaller Plates** – This is a great way to achieve instant portion control. Research has shown that when people use larger plates they also take larger portions. Switching from a 10+ inch dinner plate to an 8 inch salad plate can do wonders for preventing overeating. That is of course if you keep yourself from going back for more.

STRATEGIES TO HELP PREVENT OVEREATING WHEN DINING OUT:

1. **Do not clean your plate** – While you may have been told many times as a child that you are not finished until your plate is clean, this should definitely not apply to eating out. Portion sizes at restaurants have greatly increased in size over the years. Usually dishes have enough food for at least 2 or 3 meals and that's just in the main course. Before you start eating, decide how much you will eat now and stop when you get to that point. As with the skipping seconds strategy, your leftovers can serve as a meal you can eat later. Of course if the meal was unhealthy, the best thing to do is leave the unfinished portion behind.
2. **Special Requests** – Most restaurants understand that more people are trying to eat healthy and they will do their best to accommodate you. To help prevent overeating, you can ask for a half serving or some people even order off the kid's menu. Another option, if the restaurant allows it, is to split an order with someone else. Let the waiter know and they should even bring your order with an extra plate for the second person. This strategy has the added benefit of requiring less willpower than making yourself stop eating when you still have food left.
3. **Serve Yourself Whenever Possible** – This applies mainly to situations where there are people eating around a large table of food. People tend to be extra generous when putting food on someone else's plate. To keep your portions smaller serve yourself and if you have to pass your plate, be sure to say that you want a small serving.

Bonus Thanksgiving Tip:

Instead of sitting down for hours or taking a nap after your Thanksgiving meal, it is a good idea to do some light exercise. It does not have to be a strenuous workout, but something simple like walking outside (weather permitting) would work well. The activity will help keep your metabolism up and burn some of the extra calories you ate. When you become a couch potato after a big meal, your body will have lower energy demands and a larger portion what you ate will end up being stored as fat.

Now that you have read these strategies, I have an important question for you: How do you know when you have eaten too much? As the "eat slowly" strategy indicated, you have eaten enough before you actually feel full. Therefore if you feel full after a meal you have probably eaten too much. There are exceptions, especially for people who consistently consume too few calories, but feeling full is usually a sign of overeating.

Ideally your goal should be to eat before you get really hungry and stop eating before you get full. While this may not sound realistic at the moment, if you get good at using the strategies described above, you will be well on your way to developing great eating habits and permanently preventing overeating.

WRAP UP:

That's it for this issue. I hope you all have a great couple of weeks and use this information to minimize your overeating during Thanksgiving and develop healthy eating habits year round. You may even want to think of Thanksgiving as a challenge and an opportunity for increasing your motivation. If you can control your eating on Thanksgiving, you can be confident that you have the ability to control your eating on every other day of the year. Even if you end up overeating, if you eat less than you normally would, you can still consider it a success.

Also, if you have a chance, send me an e-mail after Thanksgiving to let me know how successful you were and what tips/strategies seems to help most. With that said, have a wonderful holiday and look for my next newsletter on December 1st,

Ross