Holiday eating: Being good to blood sugar

When it comes to controlling blood sugar, the holidays can really throw people off track.

Still, with a little planning, it's possible to enjoy gatherings without giving up favorite foods. It just takes a few extra steps. Among them:

1. **Thinking before eating.** People will decide that some foods are worth the carbs or calories and others can be skipped without regrets. It's important to stick to those choices.

2. **Going easy on starchy foods.** At a big holiday meal, people may be tempted to treat themselves to mashed potatoes, stuffing, sweet potato casserole, and a dinner roll or two. It's better to choose just one. Another option: A few bites of each.

3. **Savoring sweet treats.** People can opt for small portions, and chew slowly to make them last. That helps give the brain enough time to tell the body it's full.

4. **Trying not to hang out near the food.** At parties, people can find a comfortable spot away from the table to chat, rather than nibbling mindlessly.

5. **Rethinking drinks.** Instead of alcohol or sugary beverages, people can sip something calorie-free. Seltzer can be flavored with lemon slices or a splash of fruit juice, for example.

6. **Thinking positive.** Even if people have more carbs than they intended, they haven't failed. They can just recommit to healthy eating for the next meal.

**Health care doesn’t take a holiday**

It can be easy to overlook medications, blood sugar checks and doctor’s appointments at this time of year. People should do their best to stay on track — and reach out to their care manager or doctor if they have any questions or need help. Their doctor may be able to refer them to a nutritionist for a more detailed holiday eating plan.

**Sources:** American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org); American Association of Diabetes Educators (www.diabeteseducator.org)
How to make it through the holidays

The holidays can be stressful for the healthiest people. They can prove to be an even tougher time for people with a chronic illness.

People should keep in mind that they can opt out of any holiday events they don’t feel up to attending. It’s OK to say no. When they do take part, they can:

• Let someone else take on hosting duties.
• Plan in advance how they want to spend their time — and with whom.
• Take breaks from the social scene if they feel themselves running low on energy.
• Feeling tired? It’s OK to take a nap.
• Avoid alcohol. It can worsen bad moods or feelings.
• Take care of themselves by eating balanced meals.
• Give themselves permission to express their emotions. People shouldn’t try to force a happy face if they’re really feeling down.
• Try taking a walk when the sun’s out. Gray days can bring on seasonal affective disorder — a type of depression. Getting out in the sun can brighten their mood.
• Get plenty of rest so they have the energy for favorite events.

Keeping in touch

In the bustle of the holidays, people shouldn’t let their health fall by the wayside. Their primary care provider and care manager can answer their questions and point them to tools that make managing their health easier. Those include mobile apps to track blood pressure, cholesterol, medications, daily activity or calories. If people feel stressed or overwhelmed by their health, they should reach out. They’re not alone.

Sources: Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org); American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org); National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org)

Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve

If you are a caregiver, ask your loved one’s care manager about their needed services as well as services you might need as a caregiver. For example, you may feel overwhelmed, sad or burned out. The care manager can provide information and referrals for support.

Get the shot, not the flu

Just about everyone who’s 6 months of age or older needs a flu shot. That’s especially true for people with a chronic illness.

The best time to get a shot is before the flu starts spreading in your community. That’s hard to predict. It’s probably best to get the shot as soon as it’s available in your area.

Remember: You can’t get the flu from a shot. It’s among the best ways to avoid getting the flu.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)