

# Surviving the Holidays – 10 Steps to Success

By Beverly Thomassian, RN, MPH, CDE, BC-ADM

Even when everything goes according to plan, the holiday season can be stressful. We get out of our usual rhythms of sleep and work. There are travel negotiations, eating out, parties, counters filled with treats, kids on vacation and visitors.

What can we do to make it through the holiday season and be ready to embark on a new year feeling our best? We have ten strategies for you. And even if you can't do all ten, just pick one or a few that you feel you can commit to and succeed with *most of the time*.

1. **Be a sleep warrior.** Americans are chronically under slept. Not getting enough sleep is associated



with increased hunger, higher blood sugars, poor concentration, more illness and impaired problem solving. Make sure to give yourself the gift of at least 7 hours of sleep a night. This sleep will help you make the best choices for your health and will protect against illness and fatigue. You got this.

**Goal: Get at least 7 hours of sleep a night. You deserve it.**

2. **Keep active** – Holidays can put our exercise plans to the test, but we have some workaround ideas for you. Invite friends and family to join you for an after meal stroll instead of plopping on the couch. After meal walks lower post meal blood sugars and increase energy by getting muscles activated. And just 10 minutes of walking after meals can make a big difference. Other ideas include; playing catch or Frisbee, put on some music and get people dancing, rake leaves, organize a game of touch football, have family and friends sign up for a local walk event.

**Goal: Work toward 30 minutes of activity a day.**



**Don't forget the Fiber** – With all the snacks and tempting foods, whole healthy foods may take a back seat. Enjoy the abundance of seasonal vegetables, fruits, nuts and grains that are fiber rich and that decrease inflammation. Examples include; yams, squash, mandarin oranges, almonds, pistachios, quinoa, kale, brown rice, warm oatmeal, salads and broth based soups.

**Goal: Strive to eat at least 25gms of fiber a day**

4. **Enjoy the ultimate beverage – H2O.** Water is the perfect way to keep hydrated, replenished and keeps appetite in check. Add a splash of flavor with a jigger of fruit juice or fresh cucumbers, lime slices or a sprig of rosemary. Be creative. Sparkling waters come in a vast variety of flavors, are calorie free and contain no artificial sweeteners.



**Goal: Keep hydrated by enjoying plenty of water.**

5. **Keep an eye on alcohol** – While it's true that red wine offers a beneficial anti-inflammatory compound called resveratrol, drinking too much alcohol can lead to unintended outcomes. Studies show that we make poorer food choices if alcohol is on board. This can offer special challenges in party settings, where temptations are abundant. A drink of alcohol contains about 100 calories and mixed drinks have even more. In addition, alcohol can lead to low blood sugars, especially for those taking insulin or sulfonylureas.



**Goal: Limit alcohol to one drink a day women, two drinks a day for men.**

6. **You are already sweet enough** – Holidays and sugar go hand in hand. If possible, try and eat less than 6 teaspoons of added sugar (does not include natural sugars found in fruit and milk). This goal may not be realistic on all days, but aim for success 80% of the time. Excess sugar intake can cause inflammation and buildup of fat in the liver. One strategy is to limit sugar intake during the day and save your 6 teaspoons for that special dessert or parties. When looking at labels, it is helpful to know that 1 teaspoon equals 4 grams of sugar.

**Goal: Limit sugar to 6 teaspoons a day**

7. **Your teeth need extra special attention** – Taking care of our teeth and gums improves health. Gum inflammation is associated with blood vessel inflammation. Swollen gums can also lead to an increase in blood sugars. During the holidays, find time for regular oral hygiene. Your mouth (and dental team) will thank you.



**Goal: Brush teeth at least twice daily and floss at least one daily**

8. **Keep connected to friends and family who love you just the way you are!** – As enjoyable as holidays can be, reuniting with family can also cause stress and stir-up emotions. Feeling out of sorts can lead to stress eating and decrease self-care. If possible, reach out to a trusted friend to share your feelings or keep a holiday journal. Consider bringing a favorite book along during your travels, that you find inspiring and comforting. Give yourself permission to steal away for some quiet time.

**Goal: Self-care is important during the holidays**

9. **Enjoy an Oxygen Cocktail** – Studies show that when humans venture into nature and outdoor settings, heart rate and blood pressure improve. Take a moment to appreciate the feeling of the air on your skin, take a deep breath of fresh air, try to find nests in leafless trees, listen to the animal sounds and bird songs and just enjoy that moment.



**Goal: Step into nature daily**

10. **Take inventory of things that you are grateful for.** Find a moment each day to reflect on a few things that brought you joy or good feelings. Maybe it was your cousin who lent you her favorite sweater. Or an Aunt who gave you the best hug. Special moments with a best friend or an after dinner walk enjoying the fall leaves. These small moments of connection and beauty are one of the most treasured gifts of the holiday season that linger in our hearts and memory long after we say our goodbyes.

**Goal: Take note of special moments**

