




Eat the Extra Piece of Pie and Enjoy the Holiday Season

by Elizabeth Sindelar-Loy
November 27 2019 2:14 PM





Thanksgiving signifies the beginning of the holiday season when our calendars fill with events that usually lead to over-indulging in food and drink consumption. For people who struggle with body-image issues, food/weight-related health problems, including and especially eating disorders, this time of year can be stressful. A season that should be joyous turns into a perfect storm of food and body anxiety.

I know this holiday struggle all too well. I wish my brain would allow me to truly enjoy this time of year instead of being riddled with anxiety over every bite of food that I eat. I grew up in a big Polish family, filled with holiday traditions and the most amazing food cooked by relatives. Yet, as much as I attempt to relax and enjoy these memories, I find it impossible at times.

My problems with how I viewed food started decades ago when I began restricting calories to look like the celebrities in fashion magazines I obsessed over. Every compliment or criticism I received regarding my weight just added fuel to the fire over the years. I thought becoming a Wellness Coach would help me find peace with food but instead, it has only made me more self-conscious about my food choices and eating around others. My family, friends and colleagues have no clue that at the end of the night, no matter what I have eaten, I usually feel guilty and end up hating myself. I know this is a major problem and I know I'm not alone.

Therefore, this holiday season I am asking people to be aware of how we talk to one another around the holiday table. Someone you love could be struggling too. The holiday season should create memories filled with happiness not self-loathing. Each one of us has the ability to create a welcoming environment. Encourage conversation that is supportive instead of asking probing questions or giving advice. Commenting about weight or questing what someone chooses to eat, will only serve to make someone with an eating disorder or body image issue more defensive, creating barriers to communication. Make it your job to be welcoming, warm and accepting of the people seated around you at the table.

For those of you with unhealthy relationships with food, I know it's difficult, but try to redirect yourself from calling the food served this time of year "bad". I fully understand we are taught holiday foods are not the most nutrient-dense and usually include ingredients we should limit but, a balanced diet can include occasional foods that are problematic. We have to remember to not limit food to just being fuel when it's also cultural, celebratory and frankly, delicious. Enjoying Grandma's homemade pie can be incredibly emotionally nourishing. The thoughts we have when we eat directly impact

our holiday memories. I know this year, I will work on telling myself, “Modest amounts of enjoying foods I love will be ok.”

The most important thing every single one of us can be conscious of this holiday season is to not give into the diet culture of our society. Starving yourself ahead of a party in order to “earn” the big holiday meal is not healthy and we need to stop encouraging it as acceptable. The practice of severely limiting nourishment to the body will only lead to overconsumption and feeling worse about food choices. Instead, try intuitive eating where you listen to your body and focus on enjoying the pleasure of eating. If something you are eating makes you feel sick or starts giving you anxiety, just stop or avoid it.

If you do end up feeling like you ate beyond fullness, allow yourself grace. Understand that you are not a bad person because of what you eat or if you over ate at a holiday party. What you choose to eat does not define who you are as a person. Feeling guilty about feeling guilty will only cause more anxiety and lead to food dominating your holiday season. Instead, try to focus on celebrating all the great things in your life while you are surrounded by family and friends.

If you are struggling this holiday season with body image or food, please know you are not alone. Reach out to someone you trust and get professional help if needed.

Opinions expressed in this section are solely those of the individual authors and do not represent the views of RiverBender.com or its affiliates. We provide a platform for community voices, but the responsibility for opinions rests with their authors.