

Help!

IT'S THE HOLIDAYS

This time of year is full of family gatherings, sweet festivities, and longtime traditions—plus the crazy chaos of preparing for it all. Maybe you're also missing lost loved ones or making peace between siblings—the stuff of life that goes hand in hand with the holidays.

So how do you manage the highs and lows of the season *and* your glucose levels? In this magazine, we write a lot about taking control—of your diabetes, of your fitness, of your food choices and habits. You can't control everything, of course. But you can pay attention to yourself and your body, limiting situations that make you feel helpless or unhealthy.

We've found a few ideas to keep in mind this season. For keeping stress under wraps (which will help you control your blood sugar), keeping weight gain in check (even with all the holiday parties), and working ahead so the big gathering isn't also a big ball of anxiety.

Start by slowing down for a minute. Take a deep breath, pull up a chair, relax, and read on.

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Stress

Long-term stress levels increase blood glucose levels—so taming the seasonal stress monster is essential for managing diabetes.

Some tips to help:

- **Play It Steady.** "Do your best to stick with your exercise, medication, and food schedule," says Susan Weiner, RDN, CDE, coauthor of *Diabetes: 365 Tips for Living Well* (Demos Health, 2015). "For most people, this is a wonderful time of year. But the holidays can mean additional pressures when you have diabetes." Whatever you do to relax and decompress, keep it up.
- **Designate Elves.** "Don't overload yourself with work—delegate tasks and chores," says Eliot LeBow, CLSW, CDE, who specializes in diabetes-focused psychotherapy and has type 1 diabetes.

You don't have to—and you shouldn't—do everything yourself, Weiner says. "If you need help in the kitchen, recruit one of your guests, friends, or a family member to join you. Ask someone to set the table and another to clean up." Consider hosting a potluck instead of cooking an entire meal alone.

- **Go Solo.** If you can afford it, consider staying at a hotel while visiting family if you think you'll need a break. Though family members might try to persuade you to stay with them, ask yourself if this is in their best interest or yours. "Sleeping in a nice hotel bed can be nicer than a

pullout couch in the middle of a living room," LeBow says.

- **Treat Yourself.** "Don't forget to treat yourself gently," LeBow says. Play music or book a massage. Get enough sleep each night—it wards off irritability and mood swings.

If it helps, grab your journal and take note of the highs and lows, as well as what you're thankful for.

- **Keep the Peace.** Meditation and breath work may relax you. Try closing your eyes and counting 100 breaths or just sit quietly and repeat a mantra that calms you. Guided meditation apps such as Headspace, Breathe2Relax, and The Mindfulness App (on iPhone or Android) also do the trick.

If there's a family squabble, remember: Most people don't deliberately try to upset others. If the relatives are good listeners, tell them you're upset with an "I feel _____ when you _____" statement. In the end, you may have to limit contact with some individuals. Cultivating relationships that are positive is mutually rewarding.

"It's always your choice to let someone upset you or to let it go," LeBow says.

- **Exercise.** Exercise reduces stress and helps to control glucose levels, Weiner says, so keep moving this season. Try home exercise videos or walking. Or start a holiday tradition that gets everyone moving. "Suggest a game of touch football or sign up for a turkey trot on Thanksgiving morning," Weiner says.

At minimum, stretch often. It helps keep you mindful of your body and your feelings.

AVOID THE HOT ZONE

Diabetes educator Eliot LeBow warns holiday revelers of the "Hot Zone"—a family gathering, a company party, or any event that involves food and drink.

"Devise a plan for your situation," LeBow says. Maybe you eat what others are eating, but in small quantities. Maybe you grab a healthy snack prior to stay satisfied through hors d'oeuvre hour—think low-fat yogurt or cheese, half a whole grain granola bar, or a handful of nuts.

The social pressure to eat at parties can be huge. "It's natural to want to fit in and have a piece of Aunt Ethel's pecan pie like everyone else," LeBow says. "We are all human. We all make mistakes and struggle with managing diabetes."

If things don't go according to your Hot Zone plan, don't feel guilty; just take action to correct. If you ate a piece of cake unexpectedly, for example, increase your insulin to cover the excess carbohydrate or adjust carbohydrate intake at a later meal. Then give yourself a pat on the back for managing an unexpected situation.

"Regardless of what type of diabetes you have, tomorrow you can start again. So get back on the wagon and do your best, because you can't change the past, but you can work toward a better future," LeBow says.