



Handling the Holidays with Diabetes

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Today's post is written by Dr. Lorraine Platka-Bird, who is a registered dietician and certified diabetes educator with Center for Hope of the Sierras where she serves as an eating disorder specialist. She has been counseling individuals with eating disorders for over 25 years and takes a holistic approach to treatment, considering all aspects of physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In addition to helping clients develop a healthy relationship with food, Dr. Platka-Bird helps individuals minimize eating disorder thoughts and behaviors, improve self-image and self-esteem, and develop healthy coping skills and life skills to improve overall quality of life. Previously, Dr. Platka-Bird worked as a professor in the Nutrition and Dietetics Department at the State University of New York for 19 years and was granted some of the most prestigious teaching awards offered in the State University system.

With the holidays right around the corner, many of us look forward to eating copious amounts of pie, turkey and all types of stuffing imaginable. But for some diabetics, the holidays are an emotionally triggering season. Rules about what one should and shouldn't eat can be confusing and frustrating. Avoiding the special treats available this time of year can lead to feelings of deprivation and urges to overeat or binge. Diabetic women are nearly three times more likely to develop an eating disorder, specifically one called diabulimia, an increasingly common disorder where insulin is intentionally mismanaged to control weight.

By reducing or skipping insulin doses entirely, diabetics may find they lose weight very rapidly, but at a dangerous cost. Mismanagement of insulin almost immediately triggers unquenchable thirst, fatigue and frequent urination, among other symptoms. Several missed doses can evolve into diabetic ketoacidosis, or DKA, a life-threatening complication where the body produces acidic ketone bodies due to a shortage of insulin. Along with DKA, the long-term results of poorly managed diabetes include cardiovascular disease, neuropathy, blindness, organ failure and loss of limbs. Diabetics with eating disorders often underestimate the consequences of purposely restricting insulin, but doing so causes long-lasting, often irreversible damage.

The abundance of holiday foods available this time of year, along with mixed messages about how to eat as a diabetic, can make diabetes management more challenging than usual. Here are three tips to help the diabetic in your life get through the holidays a little smoother:

Listen to hunger and satiety signals

Let your body's cues be your guide during the season. Eating mindfully means you can enjoy seasonal foods based on what your body wants and what tastes good, while honoring hunger and fullness cues. For diabetics, let regular blood glucose monitoring and indicated diabetes care be integral parts of this process.

Provide less sugary dessert options

Aim to provide at least one lower-sugar dessert. Having diabetes doesn't need to mean avoiding sugar altogether, but providing options gives diabetics more flexibility in deciding how to best manage their blood glucose, especially for those who tend to experience higher blood glucose at night.

Help teens stay on top of their insulin dosing

Everyone is a little more excited and giddy during the holiday season. Help teens stay on their insulin dosing even during the commotion of parties and events.