

NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS

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Holidays can bring up “all the stuff.” Memories. Obligations. Parties. Peer pressure. Nostalgia.

My mom learned to cook from *her* mom—my “Oma.” As a little girl, Mom would sit underneath the old wooden table in the small German town of Steinheim, watching Oma make spaetzle from scratch over a boiling pot of water on the cast-iron stove. My now-92-year-old mom makes that recipe by hand to this day.

In the past, holidays left me feeling conflicted, especially around food. I felt a surge of guilt if I didn’t eat the cheese and crackers, shrimp cocktail, bratwurst, dinner rolls, German noodles, salad, cheesecake, and brownies with ice cream.

After all, I was raised a card-carrying member of the Clean Your Plate Club. The result left me feeling crummy in both my belly and my heart, as I never seemed able to please everyone and myself at the same time.

You might not even realize it, but it is common to fill up so much on appetizers that by the time the meal is served, we are full. Whether from a sense of obligation or simply because the food looks so good, we keep on eating.

I thought that saying no or passing on seconds meant hurting other people’s feelings. It was just one meal—or drink, or dessert. I could always go back to my regular, mindful habits first thing in the morning.

Like many, my mom demonstrates her love by cooking all of the rich, delicious foods she grew up with. There is nothing better than

handmade German spaetzle (a small melt-in-your-mouth dumpling). Deep down, I equated saying no to her food with saying no to her love. So, I kept eating.

It took time, but I realized that just because a holiday rolled around was no reason to put myself last. I began to establish better boundaries and habits. In doing so, I learned how to balance enjoying the holidays while still prioritizing my own well-being.

Here’s the truth: What you do between Thanksgiving and New Year’s matters. This stretch of time reveals how you respond when life is full, fast, and overwhelming.

The holidays can be a powerful training ground to change your relationship with food, without skipping pie or saying no to your favorite traditions. Just slowing down and asking ourselves what we truly need can shift the pattern from feeling stuffed and remorseful to a relationship that prioritizes a positive feeling in both our minds and bodies. 

Nicole Strong served in law enforcement for over 35 years and competed in over 115 ultra marathons and Ironman triathlons. Her struggle to manage her weight led her to reexamine her relationship with food and create a weight loss program that focuses on mindset shifts rather than scarcity and deprivation. Learn more at strongwellness.net.

Creativity and versatility are defining characteristics of **Erin Hambrick**’s approach to art. Never afraid to try a new medium, her portfolio encompasses a range of traditional pieces, public art installations, graphic design, cartography, and illustrations. She can be contacted at aeronire@gmail.com.

