

Holiday Shopping Survival: Tips for Healthy Eating

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For millions of Americans, holiday shopping season shifts into high gear on Thanksgiving weekend. If you're one of the many who will be battling jam-packed parking lots, long lines and tense crowds, you may want to make sure you have some holiday shopping survival tips up your sleeve.

Franci Cohen, a New York City certified nutritionist, exercise physiologist and fitness trainer, has some tips on how to eat healthfully and maintain your energy level while shopping for the holidays.

- **Do stay hydrated.** Drink plenty of water before, during and after your busy day. Dehydration can cause headaches and lethargy.
- **Don't dive into the caffeine pool.** The high caffeine content of some soft drinks, coffees and teas can easily dehydrate you and reduce your shopping stamina.
- **Do start your day with a healthy breakfast.** Cohen recommends fresh fruit, low-fat milk and fortified whole-grain cereal that is packed with vitamin C and B-12 to boost immunity and energy.
- **Don't grab a breakfast bar on your way out the door.** Most breakfast bars offer little nutritional value and are filled with refined, processed ingredients, including lots of sugar.
- **Do pay attention to your Thanksgiving feast.** Skip the stuffing and pile on the veggies. Sautéed green beans are a great option. Be wary of tryptophan-filled turkey. A little is OK, but don't overdo it or you'll sleep straight through your shopping day.
- **Don't overeat and don't eat too much of the wrong foods.** Stuffing yourself silly will slow you down, as your body digests that heavy meal, and making the wrong choices will make it worse. Instead of sweet potatoes with butter, sugar, pecans and roasted marshmallows, opt for baked sweet potatoes with cinnamon and honey. The right choices and the right portions will help you succeed in both the "battle of the bulge" and the "battle of the shoppers."
- **Do pack some raw nuts, fresh apples and raw red pepper strips.** The protein in the nuts, fiber and vitamins in the apples and vitamin C in the peppers will help sustain you throughout your day, while keeping your blood sugar levels and your mood stable.
- **Don't pack candy, chocolate, chips or cookies.** Even low-cal or fat-free versions are poor snack choices. These snacks only offer quick fixes. Your sugar levels will soon spiral downward, leaving you wiped out.
- **Do eat frequently throughout the day.** Small frequent meals and snacks will give you the sustained energy you need.
- **Don't get so busy you forget to eat and drink.** A car can't run without gas, and you can't run through the shopping aisles without water and food. Be mindful of your eating.

Personally, I plan to relax with family and friends throughout the holiday weekend. I'll save my shopping marathons for later, when the crowds are less crazed. And, I'll try to remember these healthy holiday eating habits throughout the season.