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## Keeping the holidays cheerful while managing diabetes

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November marks a time for festivities, friends, family and food – so much food! While the holidays are a source of enjoyment for many who look forward to quality time with loved ones, the unprecedented focus on eating and drinking can make this time just as much a source of distress for those with diabetes.

With American Diabetes Month and Thanksgiving both occurring in November, it makes sense to review a few diabetes management guidelines to help ensure a happy and healthy holiday season.

More than 700,000 New Yorkers have diabetes – almost a third of whom are unaware that they have it. According

to the latest figures from the American Diabetes Association the disease is diagnosed in 12.1% of Hispanics and 12.7% of non-Hispanic blacks in the U.S.

When not controlled, diabetes can take a toll on nearly every organ in the body and cause long term complications such as blindness, heart disease, stroke, amputations, depression and nerve damage. This is especially true for the frail, elderly New Yorkers I care for in our VNSNY CHOICE managed long-term care health plans, who are often coping with multiple chronic illnesses in addition to a diabetes diagnosis.

While it is important to take diabetes management seriously, there are still ways for those with the disease to enjoy the holidays and maintain control of their condition. My colleague Yael Reich, RN, MSN, a Certified Diabetes Educator

with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, cites these tips from the American Diabetes Association for keeping at-risk patients on track during the holiday season. We encourage at-risk patients in our care to follow these tips from the American Diabetes Association so they stay on track throughout the holiday season:

**PLAN AHEAD:** Holidays often center around gathering to eat large meals at odd times of the day – times that may not be compatible with your regular meal schedule. If you take insulin injections or a pill that lowers blood glucose, plan to snack at your normal meal time to prevent blood sugar reactions.

**SWITCH IT UP:** Pumpkin pie, turkey, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole – Thanksgiving sees no shortage of starchy and sugary “eats.” Rather than cut out these treats

altogether, see what alternative ingredients or methods of cooking could be used to swap out fattening traditions. For example, consider roasted sweet potatoes as a replacement for candied yams, or steaming your green beans instead of sautéing them in butter. You can have that cake, but keep the portion small or substitute a healthier carb for a sugary-sweet one with little or no nutritional value. These substitutions can have a positive effect on your health without you having to miss out on your favorite foods.

**GET UP AND MOVE** Exercising after a meal helps your muscles use sugar for energy and your body use insulin more efficiently, thereby improving blood sugar levels. Resist the temptation to rest after a “decadent” meal by creating a new family tradition of going for a walk around the

neighborhood after dinner. (Visit [Diabetes.org](http://Diabetes.org) for exercise suggestions)

**RELAX:** With the exorbitant amount of planning, expending of financial resources, and traveling that comes along with the holidays, stress abounds. Anxiety can make blood sugar levels spiral out of control, which is why keeping stress in check is especially important during the holidays. Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises and making sure to get a good night's rest (at minimum six hours) can help you reduce stress and maximize your holiday cheer. (See [DiabetesSelfManagement.com](http://DiabetesSelfManagement.com) for tips)

For more information about VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans from the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, please call 1-855-AT-CHOICE (1-855-282-4642) or visit [www.VNSNYCHOICE.org](http://www.VNSNYCHOICE.org).