

The Virgin Islands Consortium

AARP VI: Tips to Stay Healthy During the Holidays

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The holidays are around the corner, and these are times when it is especially difficult to keep up with healthy diets. Food takes center stage during the holiday season for many, and it is what brings families together. Travel also increases as people embark on their traditional custom of visiting family living afar and abroad. Traveling will increase this holiday season as restrictions have been lifted and eased worldwide and in the Virgin Islands.

Nothing says holiday more than the traditional turkey and filling, the typical side dishes, and pumpkin pie. For Virgin Islanders, Johnny and Vienna Cake, even Coquito and many other delicious foods are part of the holiday menu.

For those that have worked very hard to keep in shape, the holidays can bring unprecedented concerns. A [study](#) published in The New England Journal of Medicine found that the average American gains 1.3 pounds in the ten days following Christmas. The pandemic, too, has made it challenging to keep a healthy lifestyle. An AARP [study](#) showed that “among adult’s ages 50-plus, nearly half (45%) say their ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle over the past year was more difficult”. In the VI, the [2020 Community Health Assessment](#) found a high incidence of obesity and chronic diseases such as Diabetes. The numbers can decrease if Virgin Islanders commit to healthy foods and plans we should follow.

In keeping family tradition and sharing with family members and friends, many give in to the tempting holiday dinners and do not think much of it until after the holidays pass. We hear “I will get back on track after the holidays” and “It’s only once a year, so I can.” It takes willpower not to indulge. It is especially challenging for caregivers since they must be mindful of the types of meals they prepare for their loved ones while they try to balance their own lives. Stress can cause a splurge that can contribute to weight gain and more health issues to address. When stressed, there is a tendency to eat more and stray away from a controlled plan.

There are ways to stay on track that include sticking to a regime and selecting healthier foods. We share some tips that are bound to get the mind working to find solutions.

Make Your Food Plan Holiday Proof

- Introduce new and healthier dishes to holiday meals. Modify favorite foods to remove extra calories.
- If you are invited to a party, bring a healthier dish that you can eat and share with others. There are also guests and family members who may have food restrictions or are still trying to lose weight. Visit this link for a great article on recipes for vegans and gluten-free dishes: <https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2014/thanksgiving-recipes.html>. Remember to adhere to the mask-wearing and physical distancing guidance set by the Governor of the Virgin Islands and the VI Department of Health. Visit www.vi.gov and www.doh.vi.gov, and aarp.org/vivaccine for more information.
- Cut back on the carbs if you eat something sweet. We know sugar and flour can add up to tons of calories. Say no to other bread, pastries, and rice to keep the calorie count low.

Make Healthy Choices

- If there is a buffet table, have a small plate of the foods you like the most and then walk away.
- Start with vegetables. They can help curve the appetite.
- Watch the beverage and alcohol consumption. Start your drinking with water. If you must have that wine or beer, do so in moderation and drink a bottle of water after.

Don’t Stop Exercising

- Continue your exercise regime as best you can. The holidays are a time when our schedules change a bit because of travel and visiting family. Make sure to work to get those steps or exercises in as much as possible. If you fall out of your plan, get back on as soon as the festivities end.

AARP in The Virgin Islands has exercise classes to help you sweat off those extra pounds and stay healthy. Join the Firm and Flow Exercise Class every Tuesday at 8:30 am at the AARP Virgin Islands Facebook page or Facebook.com/aarpvi. Then, stretch and align your body, mind, and soul with our gentle Yoga Class every Thursday at 9:00 am. You can learn more about these exercise events by visiting aarp.org/nearyou or aarp.org/vi.

Be sure to rest and relax. The holidays can also add stress since they involve planning and executing meals, decorating the home, gift shopping, and attending many parties and gatherings.

It is not a bad idea to make the end-year resolution of getting back on the staying healthy bandwagon if you fall off for a bit, but everything you can do ahead of time will help you get back on it a lot sooner.

AARP celebrates Caregivers in November and provides resources to help them stay healthy and care for themselves while caring for others. Caregivers in the Virgin Islands can learn more about caring for themselves while caring for loved ones by visiting <https://states.aarp.org/virgin-islands/caregiver-resources> or aarp.org/caregiving.