

Eat to Compete

Enjoy the holidays

Karen Armstrong RD

For athletes, the holiday season can mean a break from training, or a time of intense training camps and competitions. Either way, it's important to make wise food choices.

The holiday season presents extra challenges when it comes to food. First of all, holidays are about family, friends, food and entertaining. Eating patterns often shift from regular meal and snack times to constant snacking, or eating lightly early in the day in anticipation of that big meal. Secondly, there are foods that are only served during the holidays. Saying no to these special holiday treats really isn't an option.

If you're taking a training break, remember that your calorie and nutrient needs are going to be lower than your needs during training. If you don't adjust your food intake, you may be starting your next training cycle a few pounds heavier. Here are a few tips to keep the holiday goodies from adding up:

- Continue to start your day with a good breakfast (at least three of the four food groups). This keeps your appetite from getting away on you later in the day.
- Stay well hydrated. Switch to water instead of juice, milk or sports drinks if you're not actively training.
- Enjoy those special holiday favourites and eat a little less of the everyday foods.
- Take the time to really, really appreciate the flavours and textures of foods. When you're in a rest phase, you have more time to sit down at a meal and actually enjoy what you're eating.
- Try to eat small amounts often during the day, rather than holding out for the main event. You'll eat less overall, and be much more comfortable after that big holiday meal.
- Don't forget the fruits and veggies. These are a nice break from the sweet treats and high fat snacks.
- Stay active. Even though you're resting, you don't have to spend the holidays on the couch. Go for a walk; shovel snow; have a family snowball fight; go tobogganing, glow bowling, dancing – anything that gets you moving around.

Happy holidays.

Karen Armstrong is a Registered Dietitian with Manitoba Chicken Producers (www.chicken.mb.ca). She's an age group triathlete, masters swimmer, recreational skijorer and parent of a competitive swimmer. Look for more tips and information on eating to compete in upcoming issues of Coaches Clipboard. Karen can be reached at karmstrong@chicken.mb.ca.