

Family Meals Focus

The Ellyn Satter Institute Newsletter

Holiday eating success story

by Ellyn Satter, MS, MSSW, Dietitian and Family Therapist

Holiday eating can be agony for the many people who struggle with what and how much to eat. Maybe weight is the issue, maybe not. Either way they lose: They feel bad if they stick to their food rules and miss out on wonderful food and feel just as bad if they give in and eat. Feeling as they do, any amount of food is too much if it is the “wrong” food! In this issue of Family Meals Focus, a long-term dieter tells us how joyful it is for her to be Eating Competent, thanks to the help of ESI emeritus faculty member Pam Estes using “How to Eat,” the intervention taught in the *Treating the Dieting Casualty VISION Workshop*.

Thanksgiving meant being stuffed and miserable

Our Thanksgiving tradition consists of a trek to a wonderful smorgasbord restaurant. In past years, I would skip breakfast and arrive famished. To “get my money’s worth” I would skip the salad bar (even though I love salad) and go right to the hot foods. I would get a little of everything – and more than a little of my favorites – and make a return trip for more of my favorites, even though I was already stuffed. I would finish off with about three deserts. The trip home was miserable, and I still never felt like I really “got my money’s worth!”

This year I would eat what I really wanted

This year, I approached Thanksgiving with quite a different plan. The night before, I mulled over the choices of all the wonderful foods that are usually offered. Then I made a list of my personal favorites. I was clear with myself that once I got there I could add or subtract from this list if I wanted. No pressure! I also decided that instead of concentrating on “getting my money’s worth” I would *get what I wanted*. Period. What I actually wanted was the salad bar I had denied myself in past years.

It was not an eating contest

When we arrived, I hit the salad bar first. I lingered over the salads; they were so yummy. As I ate, I realized my husband and boys were on their second plates of hot food! No problem—this is not an eating contest. If it was, I had already lost! With my hunger somewhat satisfied, but still anticipating what was next, I made my choices for the rest of my meal. It was easy for me to skip the mashed potatoes and have extra chicken livers. Yum. I did not worry about eating everything I had on my plate. I realized about half-way through my hot food that I couldn’t eat it all, and if I did, I wouldn’t have room for deserts – which I really wanted. So I stopped!

Three desserts were just right

Desserts at this restaurant are special. All the favorites are there—pecan pie, bread pudding, cheesecake, ice cream, chocolate cake—whew! Most things are already sliced and on plates, and their portions are very small. This works out just great, because I can have more than one without getting too full. And I did have more than one – three to be exact! Bread pudding, peppermint ice cream, and cheesecake.



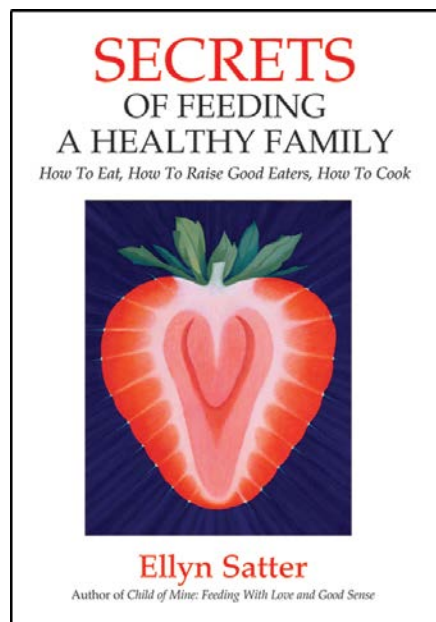
I was full but not miserable

Was I full on the way home? Yes. Was I miserable? No! But the best part was that I had what I wanted and enjoyed it all!

I am no longer desperate to eat

I cook on Christmas, so I have more control over what is served. I won't alter my menu very much, since I am really cooking for my family, and want to prepare their favorites. So far I have noticed that I can keep ingredients for cookies in the house without eating them up before I make the cookies—chocolate chips, etc. This is a big change from years past. It is comforting just knowing they are there, and that I can have them if I want them. I will approach Christmas dinner the same way as Thanksgiving. I will have what I want, enjoy my favorites first, and then go from there! Happy eating!

[Click here](#) for resources



Learn how you can be relaxed and positive about your eating—on holidays and at other times—in [Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family](#).