

# Eating During Special Occasions

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You might think of me as, “un-American,” but on Super Bowl Sunday, my friends and I went for a long run. It is the one day out of the year when we’re guaranteed to have the running/biking trail to ourselves since everyone else is glued to the tube. Perhaps if I was a football fan, things may be different. However, if I had to choose between watching someone workout or working out myself, well, I rather be doing than watching. Occasions like this are a great time to get together with friends and family and rally for your favorite team. However, events like this are more than just about the game. It’s an open invitation to an all-out-eating-frenzy.

The day after Super Bowl Sunday (the Not-so-Great Monday), I often hear the astonishing stories of my colleague’s, friend’s and neighbor’s gastrointestinal Super Bowl adventures. It’s not to say that I never overeat or indulge (magic word “chocolate”), but it’s a matter of choice and avoiding “mindless eating” (see my previous article on this topic). What’s surprising is how many people are oblivious to the amount of calories and fat that they consume during special occasions such as these. Therefore, a reality check is needed. A little information about calories and other snacking options may help everyone avoid weight gain from these more and more frequent *special occasions*.

I have a couple of philosophies on how to handle special occasion eating episodes. One is to minimize your intake a week or so prior to the special day and/or increase your physical activity. In essence, you are banking your calorie deficit so that you can reap the rewards by overeating on a designated day. The other is to minimize your intake and/or increase your physical activity for a week or so after the indulgence to balance out your overall intake. The third and probably the least attractive, is not to overindulge at all. This one takes a lot of self-control.

In order to follow through on the first and second option, you will need to know how many calories you currently need to maintain your current weight. There are tools available online such as <http://www.annecollins.com/calories/calorie-needs-men.htm> (for men) and <http://www.annecollins.com/calories/calorie-needs-women.htm> (for women). These web sites use the highly tested Harris-Benedict equation that practically every registered dietitian uses to estimate calorie needs of patients or clients. The calculation of your energy needs requires the input of several factors: gender, height, weight, age, and activity level. Looking at these factors, the information required is pretty clear-cut. Men (because of higher lean body mass) have higher energy needs than women. As an adult, you have reached your full height potential, so no change there. And, no matter how much I would like to fudge on the age category, there is no turning back the clock. Sadly, the older you get, the less calories your body needs (due to the loss of lean body mass). Thus, body weight and activity level are really the only factors you can control. The more you weigh, the more calories you need (to maintain that weight). Likewise, the less you weigh the fewer calories you need. (This means that if you lose weight, you’ll have to eat less in order to maintain the lower weight for

the rest of your life.) Obviously, the more you exercise the more calories you burn. The more calories you burn, the more energy you need (to maintain your current weight).

The practice of banking your calories as described above is better explained with the following table.

Table 1: Banking Calories

Days	Calories Needed to Maintain Current Weight*	Calories Consumed	Physical Activity— Estimated calories burned from walking/running two-three (extra) miles	Total Calorie Deficit (from less calories consumed and physical activities)
Monday	- 2000	+1750 (- 250)	- 200	- 450
Tuesday	- 2000	+1750	- 200	- 450
Wednesday	- 2000	+1750	- 200	- 450
Thursday	- 2000	+1750	- 200	- 450
Friday	- 2000	+1750	- 200	- 450
Saturday	- 2000	+1750	- 200	- 450
Super Bowl	- 2000			- 2700

\*use the web sites listed above to determine your calorie needs

In this example, the individual needs about 2000 calories to maintain her weight. By cutting back on 250 calories a day and walking/running 2-3 extra more miles per day (which burns an additional 200 calories), her daily calorie deficit is 450. Over six days, she would accumulate a 2700-calorie deficit. Since her daily calorie need is 2000 calories (to maintain her current weight), this means by Sunday, she could eat 2000 + 2700 or 4700 calories and still be at a zero balance. Likewise, this principle can be applied the week after Super Bowl Sunday (instead of the week before as shown in the table) by eating less that week

Knowing that you have 4700 calories to splurge on Super Bowl snacks sounds like an incredible amount but let me show you how quickly that is spent.

Food	Calories*	Fat (grams)*
5 handfuls of potato chips (5 oz)	775	50
8 Tablespoons of Onion Dip	200	20
6 pieces of KFC Chicken wings	540	33
6-8 nachos (w/ cheese & Jalapeno)	608	34
1 piece (4 oz) brownies	460	22
2 cans (12 fl oz each) beer	306	0
One 6" Cold cut sandwich	410	17
1 cup mixed nuts	814	77
8 Ritz crackers	160	8
4 oz cheddar cheese	440	36

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Total	4713 calories	291 grams
Percent of her needs	236%	434%

\* Values from: Calorie Count: A free service of About.com Health <http://caloriecount.about.com/calories-fruits-fruit-juices-ic0900>

The above list does not include breakfast, any other actual meals or late night snacks. . Remember, too, that the above list of foods is well over her maximum calorie and fat needs for the day (at 236% and 434% respectively). Clearly, if you consume more calories than what is banked, a positive energy balance will result. This can then lead to weight gain. To avoid this, more calorie deficits must be practiced. However, with so many special occasions occurring (sometimes weekly), it is difficult to maintain this type of “deficit eating” (by creating the calorie bank) and indulge weekly without going over your balance. Overall, to avoid weight gain, these special events must be carefully planned and scheduled.

Another option to manage consumption during special occasions involves making wiser food choices or simply eating less food. Take the above example. What if you only ate half of everything listed (e.g., 3 chicken wings instead of 6, 1 beer instead of 2, ½ cup of nuts instead of a whole cup, etc.)? This would reduce your calorie intake to 2357. This is well below the banked calories. In fact, if this is continuously practiced at each special occasion, weight loss will occur. There is no change in the food choices, what is changed is the amount of food consumed. You can still indulge and eat the same foods as everyone else, but just eat less. In addition, consider choosing fruits and vegetables instead of chips and baked goods. Raw fruits and vegetables are low in calories and low in fat. It takes an incredible amount of vegetables to equal the calories in five handfuls of chips (775 calories). To eat 775 calories, you would have to eat:

194 baby carrots,  
41 cups of celery,  
26 cups of broccoli, or  
17 cups of sweet red pepper.

A serving of a brownie contains 460 calories. To eat 460 calories of fruit, you would have to eat:

4 cups of grapes,  
10 cups of watermelon,  
7.5 cups of cantaloupe,  
9 cups of strawberries,  
7 cups of raspberries,  
7 cups of apple slices, or  
7 cups of honeydew.

There is definitely a lot more volume of food for the calories when you switch to fresh fruits and vegetables. If fruits and vegetables are not on the menu, offer to bring them to the party.

Another suggestion to minimize overeating at special occasions is to be a social butterfly. Make it a point to walk around and talk to as many people as you can. Believe me, it is hard to talk and eat at the same time. If you are too shy to do that, then you can actually watch the Super Bowl. I hear the commercials are as entertaining as the game itself. Carry or hold a glass of water or diet soda to occupy your hands. It'll make it more difficult to eat and carry a plateful of food. If this doesn't work, well, there is plenty of room on the bike trail for one more runner.