Being prepared, having a game plan and staying positive are all keys to changing the way you think about eating during family gatherings. Avoid seasonal weight gain and allow yourself to enjoy time with loved ones without worrying about your food choices.

Here are tips to help you enjoy Thanksgiving and other upcoming holiday get-togethers without regret:

• **Eat before** — Eat something light before you attend a holiday meal or buffet. Vegetables with low-calorie dip, salad, a handful of walnuts, or light yogurt will curb your appetite and make it easier to control your intake.

• **Bring a dish** — If you know the hostess, offer to bring a healthy “dish to pass” that you won’t feel guilty about enjoying, like simple sweet potatoes or a low-fat green bean casserole.

• **Modify recipes** — Exchange sugar and fat in recipes with healthier alternatives, such as honey, olive oil and applesauce. Include “high-impact” flavors from spices, seasonal fruits and vegetables, and fresh herbs.

• **Limit alcohol** — Alcohol is an appetite stimulant. Sip slowly or have a non-alcoholic drink instead. A calorie-free beverage allows you to use those calories for food.

• **Choose carefully** — Some “best bets” at the buffet include fresh fruit, whole-grain crackers with hummus or reduced-fat cheese, shrimp cocktail, crab, pretzels, turkey breast and lean ham.

• **Think simple** — Choose foods cooked without butter and sauce. As a general rule, fried foods or foods covered with sauces add 10 grams of fat, or 90 calories, per serving.

• **Trick yourself** — Use salad plates and slender glasses. Smaller dishes cause you to take less, while giving the illusion that you are actually eating more.

• **Don’t feel guilty** — If you “overdid it” at the meal or party, don’t give up. Just eat carefully for the next day or two and add extra activity to avoid gaining extra pounds.

• **Don’t keep leftovers** — If you are hosting Thanksgiving or other holiday meals, be sure to send leftovers home with your guests to avoid temptations. Put leftovers away immediately to avoid unnecessary snacking.

• **Consider a nap alternative** — Make an after-meal walk, game of touch football, or trip to an ice-skating rink part of your holiday tradition. Sign up and train for a “turkey trot” 5K race in your area, commonly held the morning of Thanksgiving. Or, spend the afternoon volunteering at a local soup kitchen or shelter.

• **Exercise** — Increase your normal exercise routine the day before and after the holiday. This should help to compensate for possible overeating and lack of physical activity while visiting with friends and family.

TOPS Club Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), the only nonprofit, noncommercial weight-loss organization of its kind, provided this article. For more information, visit www.tops.org.