

HOLIDAY WEIGHT GAIN

Last week, I saw a sign in the window of an exercise salon which read “Only 45 **Shaping** Days until Christmas.” Every year at this time, we marvel at the speed with which the holiday season has returned. Streets, homes, malls and stores are suddenly transformed into winter wonderlands with beautiful decorations, holiday fragrances, every imaginable type of gift and tempting foods. For the majority of us, the six weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year are the most joyous of the year as a time for reflection, gratitude, sharing, family reunions, parties, and of course, delicious foods!

For many years, we have been told that the average American gains eight to ten pounds over the holidays. However, the good news is that research conducted through the National Institutes of Health demonstrates that the average person's weight gain during this time is not the ten pounds we have always been led to believe but only one to two pounds. Unfortunately, the same research reveals that most of us never lose those pounds and each year our weight continues to increase. Within a decade this weight gain becomes ten or twenty pounds! This increase is one of the main reasons that two thirds of the American population are overweight or obese, conditions which result in elevated blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes and other serious weight related health conditions or even premature death.

Fortunately, utilizing simple strategies, one can still enjoy the holidays and avoid the holiday weight gain most experience and indeed, as many of our patients do every year, lose weight during this time! The following are just a few that are effective:

1. Stay active: If you are a regular exerciser, keep it up. If not, begin with a simple daily walk. Physical activity is the one area of caloric utilization we can control. **Always consult a physician prior to beginning an exercise or diet program!**
2. Never go to a party hungry: Don't skip meals prior to a celebration and have a low calorie snack and low calorie beverage prior to arriving at the party.
3. Stay hydrated: Dehydration can be misconstrued as hunger resulting in overeating. Low calorie beverages such as water and other sugar free drinks can prevent this. Alcohol can compound the problem so drink in moderation and remember to include the calories in alcohol in your daily count..
4. Enjoy your favorite treats in moderation: Use the “one a day” trick. Give yourself permission to enjoy a reasonably sized portion of one of your favorite treats everyday thereby avoiding a sense of deprivation.
5. Get enough sleep: Sleep loss negatively impacts our metabolism and frequently results in increased hunger and weight gain.
6. Forgive yourself: If you slip up don't dwell upon it but rather assess what happened and make slight modifications to avoid it in the future. We are all human!
7. Eat slowly: We have hormonal mechanisms that tell us when we are full. It takes approximately 20 minutes for our brain to recognize the signals so eating slowly will work to your advantage.
8. Survey the food offerings prior to eating and start with low calorie, high fiber selections such as fruits and vegetables: Proper food choices are essential to health and weight control and these

- items will fill you up rapidly thereby reducing the amount of high calorie foods you consume.
9. Weigh yourself daily: I strongly recommend this throughout the year as it allows each of us to assess our weight regularly and make necessary modifications to our diet and activity which will allow us to lose any extra weight we may have gained.
 10. Feel empowered to say "No!": Friends and acquaintances frequently offer us, with the best of intentions, treats that we know will adversely affect our weight and we, not wanting to appear ungrateful, accept the invitation even though we know it will sabotage our diet. We would have no hesitation in declining an such an offer if we knew we were allergic or it violated our religious beliefs. Similarly, in these situations because of our health we should decline respectfully but firmly.
 11. Believe in Santa Claus: When you stop believing in Santa Claus you start getting socks and underwear for presents!

These are just a few recommendations which, as many of our patients will attest, allow you to avoid holiday weight gain while increasing your self image as well as confidence in your own self control making this wonderful time of the year even more special. Don't hesitate to see us for other techniques and further assistance with your weight and health. After all, health is the greatest gift of all!

Happy Holidays

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