Let the Holiday Spirit Move You!

Get moving and eat healthfully during the holidays. Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa, prevent holiday weight gain by balancing your physical activity with your food intake.

Set a Goal to Maintain Your Weight
Have reasonable expectations. Plan to maintain your weight over the holidays instead of trying to lose weight. If you overindulge at a party, spend some extra time engaged in physical activity to compensate. Physical activity simply means moving your body to use energy.

A busy schedule is no excuse to stop being physically active or to overeat. Enjoy some of your favorite foods, but balance them with regular physical activity and practice portion control and moderation. Eating more calories than you burn results in weight gain.

To prevent weight gain during the holidays, you must be in “energy balance.” The energy, or calories, you get from food and drinks (energy IN) must balance with the energy your body uses for tasks such as breathing, digestion and physical activity (energy OUT). If you consume 3,500 more calories than your body burns, you will gain 1 pound of weight.

The average American gains about 1 pound during the holiday season. Some people are likely to gain even more weight, including those who are less active, stay hungrier, or are already overweight or obese. Most individuals never lose that holiday weight gain, so the pounds accumulate and may become a major contributor to obesity later in life.

Schedule Activity Into Your Daily Routine
“Daily physical exercise is a gift only you can give yourself, and it is a gift you deserve,” according to Dr. Ann Kulze in her book, Dr. Ann’s 10-Step Diet.

You must make time for your health. Schedule time for physical activity in advance rather than leave it to chance. Put it on your calendar and treat it like an important appointment. If you already get plenty of physical activity, stick to your regular routine whenever possible during the holidays.

Schedule physical activity anytime during the day that is convenient for you. Doing it early in the morning “jump starts” your metabolism and keeps it elevated for up to 24 hours.

When starting to include physical activity in your daily routine, choose activities that you truly enjoy and that match your abilities so that you can stick with them. You might enjoy jogging, riding a bicycle, swimming, taking water aerobics or practicing yoga at home. Keep it interesting by being adventurous and trying new activities.

Vary your workouts to prevent monotony and boredom. For example, walk the first day, ride your bike or swim the second day, and do some strength-building activities (e.g. sit-ups, push-ups and weight lifting) on the third day. To keep your muscles strong, gradually add more strength-building activities on 2 or more days a week.

Committing 30 minutes, or about 2% of your day, to physical activity is worth the benefits. Allow up to 6 months for this new behavior to become internalized. Eventually it will become as second nature as brushing your teeth.
**Walk:** Walking is an activity that most people are able to do. It is free, can be done almost anywhere, and the only equipment needed is a good pair of walking shoes.

Take your pet for a walk. Walk in the woods to collect foliage and pine cones for decorating. Or, take a private, solitary walk to de-stress and clear your mind.

**Recommended Number of Steps to Walk Daily:**
America on the Move (AOM) recommends walking a minimum of 10,000 steps a day. However, most Americans get little physical activity and walk only about 5,000 steps a day. People who are more sedentary than active walk an average of only 2,000 to 4,000 steps daily.

If you have not been physically active, consider wearing a pedometer to count your steps. It counts every step you make, whether it is around the local walking track or to and from your living room. A 10-minute walk adds about 1,000 steps to your daily count.

Set a goal to walk an extra 2,000 steps and consume 100 fewer calories every day. Gradually increase your goal until you are walking the recommended 10,000 steps, or about 5 miles, every day. America on the Move recommends this small steps approach, which builds your confidence to do more over time.

**Amount of Physical Activity Needed Daily:**
Adults (ages 18 and older) need at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity every day, or on most days. Older adults and people with disabilities should be as physically active as their abilities allow. Sedentary people over the age of 40 automatically lose muscle mass at the rate of 10% every 10 years. This makes 30 minutes of daily physical activity very important!

Children and adolescents need 60 minutes or more of moderate- or vigorous-intensity physical activity every day. They should do vigorous-intensity activity on at least 3 days a week and muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening activity on at least 3 days a week.

The time can be broken down into 10- or 15-minute sessions several times a day, such as early morning, lunchtime and after dinner. Taking a 10-minute brisk walk, 3 times a day, 5 days a week results in a total of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity during the week. While people vary in how much physical activity they need for weight control, many can maintain their weight by doing 150 to 300 minutes (2½ to 5 hours) a week of brisk walking or other moderate-intensity activity.

**Easy Ways to Get Moving During the Holidays**
Celebrate around activities, not food. Turn physical activity into a social event done with friends or family members. Teaming up with others makes it more fun and keeps you motivated. Look for seasonal activities that can become family traditions to have fun while becoming healthier.

Walk around your neighborhood to view lighting displays rather than ride in your car. Go snow skiing, sledding, ice skating, or take a winter nature hike in a local park. Make a New Year’s resolution to begin a daily walking group.

Throw a Frisbee, roller-blade, shoot hoops, or play a game of soccer with your children. Play some backyard football during half-time or before the big holiday dinner. You can burn as many as 140 calories for every 15 minutes of play. That’s twice as many calories as you burn watching the game on TV for an entire hour!

Exercise or dance to your favorite holiday music. According to studies, people who listen to music while exercising work harder without realizing it. Line dance or work out to an exercise DVD.

When shopping, get in some extra steps by parking further from the store. Try mall walking, enjoying the decorations and doing some window shopping as you walk. Walking at a moderate pace burns about 225 calories in 1 hour. Climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator. Do your own housework and yard work, and do it at a faster pace.

Limit your family’s television viewing time and times spent playing video and computer games to 2 hours or less per day. Instead, take a brisk walk or a bike ride around the neighborhood or the nearest trail or national park.
Health Benefits of Physical Activity
Physical activity is an effective way to prevent weight gain and release stress during the holidays. Here are some of the health benefits of physical activity on the body.

• burns calories
• helps prevent weight gain
• helps build muscle, which increases the amount of calories burned, even at rest
• improves balance, strength, stamina, endurance and flexibility
• suppresses the appetite
• relieves or helps to avoid holiday stress and anxiety by helping the body relax, releasing emotional tension, promoting better quality sleep and creating feelings of psychological well-being
• boosts energy levels, resulting in greater productivity during the holidays
• improves overall immune function
• can protect from cardiovascular disease, cancer (breast, colon and prostate), type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and arthritis
• stimulates the brain and improves cognitive function in older adults
• improves sexual function
• improves physical appearance
• boosts self-esteem
• enhances longevity

Drink plenty of water so that you can achieve peak levels of physical activity and burn fat more readily. Non-fat milk also is a good energy drink and a way to rehydrate before and after physical activity.

Eat Healthfully During the Holidays
Refer to HGIC 4092, Control Holiday Weight Gain for helpful tips on eating sensibly at parties and buffets and modifying recipes to cut calories from popular holiday foods and beverages. This fact sheet also includes a daily food diary to demonstrate how tiny tastes add up to extra holiday calories.

Facts on Being Overweight or Obese
Being overweight or obese is determined by a person’s body mass index (BMI), a measurement of body fat based on height and weight. An adult (20 years old and older) with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight, and they qualify as obese if their BMI is 30 or more. The interpretation of BMI for children and teens (ages 2-19) is both age- and gender-specific. To calculate BMI, go to http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/index.html. Being overweight or obese increases risk for certain diseases and health problems (e.g. heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, gallstones, breathing problems and certain cancers).

Physical activity and healthful eating patterns, which are established during childhood and often last a lifetime, can reduce obesity rates and lower risk for serious health problems that come with it. However, inactivity has been increasing among youth, putting them at risk for being overweight or obese. As a result, children are becoming type 2 diabetics and showing signs of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma and sleep apnea. They also are experiencing problems with self-image and how they feel about themselves. To achieve a healthful weight, children and teens should focus on eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains and increasing physical activity, rather than cutting calories.

In the United States: During the last 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of adults and children who are either overweight or obese. Although obesity affects all ages and races, African Americans have a 51% higher rate than whites, and Hispanics have a 21% higher rate than whites.

Since the late 1970s, rates of children who are obese have tripled and rates for teens have more than doubled. The number of children who are overweight has doubled for preschoolers (ages 2-5) and teens (ages 12-19), while it has tripled for school-aged children (ages 6-11 years). Both boys and girls are equally at risk.

In 2008, two-thirds (66-68%) of US adults were either overweight or obese, reports the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). A 2008 study found that 31.7% of American children are obese or overweight, according to the January 2010 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. CDC statistics also showed obesity rates of 17% in teens and in school-aged children and more than 12% in preschoolers.
In South Carolina: Obesity, poor nutrition and limited physical activity are significant health concerns in South Carolina. In 2007 South Carolina had the seventh worst obesity rate in the nation, with 65% of adults either overweight or obese. In 2009 the state’s obesity rate was the tenth highest in the nation, according to the CDC. Almost one in three (29.4%) South Carolina adults is obese.

Over 25% of low-income preschoolers and 31.5% of high school students are overweight or obese. A 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey also revealed that 32.2% of middle school students are overweight or obese. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) states that “If current trends continue, 30% of boys and 40% of girls born in 2000 will develop type 2 diabetes, primarily due to a poor diet and lack of physical activity.”

South Carolinians consistently do not meet recommended levels of physical activity and consumption of fruits and vegetables. Half of South Carolina adults and 62% of high school students do not get the recommended amounts of daily physical activity. The state leads the nation in the percentage of children (54.5%) who don’t participate in after-school team sports or lessons.

Obesity can be reduced in South Carolina if citizens get adequate physical activity, eat healthfully and make other positive lifestyle changes.

Sources:

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