Get Moving to Prevent Holiday Weight Gain

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 and beverage intake. Set a goal to maintain your weight instead of trying to lose weight.

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. Most people never lose that holiday weight gain, so the pounds accumulate and may become a major contributor to obesity later in life.

A busy schedule is no excuse to stop being physically active. Schedule it into your daily routine in advance rather than leave it to chance. Put it on your calendar anytime during the day that is convenient for you, and treat it like an important appointment. Doing it early in the morning “jump starts” your metabolism and keeps it elevated for up to 24 hours. If you already get plenty of physical activity, stick to your regular routine.

Physical activity simply means moving your body to use energy. Choose activities that you truly enjoy and that match your abilities so that you can stick with them. Vary your workouts to prevent boredom. Walking is an activity that most people are able to do, and it burns about 225 calories per hour when moving at a moderate pace. America on the Move (AOM) recommends walking a minimum of 10,000 steps a day. A brisk 10-minute walk adds about 1,000 steps to your daily count.

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. Children and adolescents need 60 minutes or more of moderate- or vigorous-intensity physical activity every day.

To make physical activity fun and to keep yourself motivated, turn it into a social event with friends or family members. Look for seasonal activities that can become family traditions. Here are some easy ways to get moving during the holidays.

- 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.
- 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.
- Climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator.
- Do your own housework and yard work, and do it at a faster pace.
• Take your pet for a walk.
• Walk in the woods to collect foliage and pine cones for decorating.
• Take a private, solitary walk to de-stress and clear your mind.
• Make a New Year’s resolution to begin a daily walking group.

HGIC 4034, *Let the Holiday Spirit Move You!* contains additional information on the importance of being physically active and facts about the dramatic increase in the number of overweight and obese people in the United States during the last 20 years. Refer to HGIC 4092, *Control Holiday Weight Gain* for helpful tips on eating sensibly at parties and buffets and ways to modify 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.

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