

Maintaining Your Weight During the Holiday Season

By Kim Siegel, Personal Trainer

The national average for weight gained per person during the holiday season is ten pounds. I don't know about you, but those ten pounds seem like the hardest to take off come January. Wouldn't it be better to keep your same weight, or at least minimize the damage, but still be able to enjoy yourself? If you follow these steps you should be able to maintain your current weight throughout the season.

With the coming of winter our daylight hours becomes less, our free time is taken up with holiday shopping, decorating, getting ready for parties, etc. Not to mention all the extra food and alcohol we consume. So how do you keep to your eating habits and workout schedules?

Let's talk about food and alcohol first. Most importantly, keep your refined carbohydrates to a minimum. Next, you think you are so busy that you have to eat out more, both for lunch and dinner, right? Wrong! This is one area we seem too forget about, but when you eat out, even if you think you are ordering healthy items, do you really know all the ingredients? You can add at least 100 to 200 calories to the amount you think you're eating, and that's for lunch. You can easily add 300 to 700 calories for dinner. Why not plan ahead? When you have time to cook supper, *beginning now*, cook twice the amount and freeze the other portion. You will keep a nice variety readily available for those nights you are running behind.

Lunch becomes another problem area when we get busy and are not at home. First, I recommend eating a large breakfast so that you are not hungry as early as you normally would be. Second, keep a supply of meal bars in your purse. Be sure to look carefully at the ingredients, as all meal bars are not created equal. I am not a big fan of these bars on a regular basis, but they come in handy during times like these. You want to look for a bar that has at least 4-5 grams of fiber and little or no sugar or sugar alcohols. Also, keep a baggie with raw vegetables with you at all times, you can include low fat mozzarella cheese sticks also. The crunch from the veggies will satisfy some of your cravings, and they will keep fresh for long periods of time without being refrigerated.

Party time usually means alcohol time. Mixed drinks can do the most harm to your well-laid plans more than anything else. Not only do these drinks contain a large amount of sugar, but also the alcohol itself contains sugar alcohols, which cause your body to react in a similar manner as it does with sugar, raising your insulin level in your blood, thus telling your body it needs to store fat. I recommend that your first choice of beverages be red wine. It contains a minimum of sugar, has 70 calories per glass, and is considered to be a health benefit from the red grapes and their antioxidant powers. Be sure to eat when you drink in order to minimize the impact of the alcohol in your body. If you do not care for wine, then stay away from the drinks in which a mixer is used, such as margaritas, daiquiris, etc. and nurse one drink for as long as you can.

Following this simple eating plan will allow you to be able to enjoy the holiday dinners and parties without gaining weight and feeling guilty, just keep in mind everything should be done in moderation. If you think that there will not be any healthy choices at a party you will be attending, eat first before you go so you won't be tempted.

To make up for those missed workouts I suggest that you follow the guideline of parking your car not only further out in the parking lot of the mall, but also the opposite end of where you know you want to go. You could possibly add a quarter of a mile each way without a large impact on your time. Try and work in at least two 30-minute workouts per week during this stressful time. Not only will it help you to stay in shape, but working out is also a great stress reliever. When you workout, your body produces endorphins, which give you a euphoric feeling, thus relieving the built up stress and tension.

Just remember that if you fall off the wagon, don't make it worse by thinking that you already messed up so you might as well go for it. Just eat extra healthy the next few days and you will be able to minimize the damage. Also, by eating a larger percentage of proteins it will allow your body to eliminate the extra water weight gain from your body.

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