

## Health

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### Six steps for surviving the holiday weight gain

Holidays are a time to rejoice, celebrate and share fond memories, but it is also a time for eating and more eating. The truth is, one of the toughest times of the year for people trying to lose weight is the holiday season from Thanksgiving to New Year's. Wherever you go, whatever you do, food always seems to be the central focus. You suddenly find "goodies" in the kitchen, on coffee tables, at the office, grocery store, friend's house and all those parties. How can you try to maintain your weight and heart-health during such a tempting time?

The first thing to remember is that a recent report from the National Institutes of Health indicates that Americans gain only about one pound between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Volunteers in a study about holiday weight gain were asked about factors that might influence weight changes, such as stress, hunger, activity level, changes in smoking habits and number of holiday parties attended. The researchers found that two factors appear to have the greatest influence on weight gain: level of hunger and level of activity. In addition, volunteers believed that they had gained much more weight than they actually had during the study. While most people believe that they gain more than 5-10 pounds during the holidays, the study showed that fewer than 10 percent gain more than five pounds. The primary problem is when added weight isn't lost before the next "over-eating event" occurs. Over time, those extra pounds contribute to the obesity epidemic.

What can you do to help prevent holiday weight gain? Here are 6-steps for surviving the holiday challenge to weight gain.

1. **GET MOVING.** Stick to your regular exercise routine as much as possible. Plan your physical activity routine in advance and mark it on the calendar - do not leave it up to chance. Exercise is a great way to burn extra calories you may be taking in this time of year and it helps to reduce stress.
2. **AIM FOR FIVE PER DAY.** Make sure you eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day to help fill up your stomach but not your calorie level.
3. **CONTROL THE RISK OF TEMPTATION.** While you won't be able to control all situations, you can focus on the situations you do have control over such as your desk and home. Can you get co-workers to agree to keep goodies only in the break room? Then, plan to go into the break room only once a day. Can you store your baked foods in one room of the house, in sealed containers, and then promise yourself not to go near them

until you are ready to use the food? Never shop when you're hungry and avoid the candy and cookie aisles.

4. **NEVER GO TO A PARTY HUNGRY.** Don't skip eating all day to “save up” for the food at a party. Eat something nutritious before you go and eat small portions of foods at the party.

5. **PLAN AHEAD TO BRING A LOW CALORIE DISH TO POTLUCKS.** At least you'll know that you have one low calorie dish to choose from. If you can't bring a dish, select the healthier dishes first to fill up your plate, such as fruits, vegetables and lean meats. Once you fill your plate, walk away, sit down and enjoy the food. Wait twenty to thirty minutes before going for seconds.

6. **FOCUS ON SOCIALIZING.** Don't stand around the food table. Focus your energy on making conversation instead of focusing on food

Remember, the holidays are meant to celebrate good times with family and friends. Enjoy the holidays and plan effective strategies to help you achieve your weight loss, or maintenance, goals. Achieving what you desire will give you one more good reason for holiday cheer. Happy holidays.