



Nutri-Facts

Issue #14, November, 2001

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Greetings all!

The holiday season is rapidly approaching. No matter how we celebrate, Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanza, there are favorite foods that appear during this time of the year. These foods may include eggnog, sufganiyot, or sweet potato pie. For many people, however, the holiday season is also associated with an increase in our weight.

While people commonly believe that the average weight gain during the holiday season is about 5 pounds, recent research suggests that actual weight gain is really closer to one pound. Unfortunately, we tend to hang on to that one pound and pick up another one the next holiday season. This has some experts thinking that in the long term, this could be one of the factors contributing to the increase in obesity among American adults.

So what are we to do? This issue focuses on ways that we can control our weight during the holiday season and still enjoy our favorite foods. For agents, there is an information sheet that outlines some easy tips to help us watch our waistline at parties and when shopping. There is also a consumer fact sheet and a news release available as well.

As always, I appreciate any ideas/comments about future issues of Nutri-Facts.

Eat Well!
Jenna

The truth about holiday weight gain

It is commonly assumed that the average American gains at least 5 pounds during the holiday season (the time between Thanksgiving and the start of the new year). Until recently, however, there was no scientific research to support this assumption. Last year (2000), researchers with the National Institutes of Health studied the weights of 200 adults beginning in late September through early March. Subjects were then measured in June and again in September to provide an observation of changes in body weight for a full one-year period. Data collected from these subjects included weight, blood pressure and diet and activity habits.

The results of this study were very interesting. The average amount of weight gained by adults during the holiday season was 0.48 kilograms - just a little over 1 pound. However, this gain was not reversed after the first of the new year or even during the spring or summer months. This led the authors of the study to conclude that although the weight gained during the holiday season was much smaller than previously believed, over time that weight probably contributes to the increase in body weight typically observed during adulthood.

So, what can we tell our clients/consumers when it comes to holiday weight gain? The good news is that the amount of weight gained (on average) appears to be much lower than previously believed. However, the bad news is that this weight tends to stick with us during adulthood. The most practical advice that we can give is to practice moderation and weight maintenance during the holiday season. Enjoy those favorite holiday foods, but balance them out with regular physical activity and common sense portion control. For some people, this is easier said than done so here are some tips to share with your clients to help them survive this holiday season.

Surviving the holiday season - Party Time!

In the above study, subjects reported that they attended more than 4 holiday parties between Thanksgiving and the start of the new year. We know that parties add to the festive nature of the holiday season and provide us with opportunities to socialize with family, friends, and co-workers. However, these parties can also be a source of significant calories if we are not careful. Below are 10 tips that can be used to help control calorie intake for just about any holiday buffet, office party, or cocktail party:

- 1. Balance party foods and meals with other meals.** Eat smaller meals with fewer calories during the day so you can enjoy the party - without exceeding one's energy intake for the whole day. For those smaller meals, include low-fat protein as well as fruit, vegetables, and whole grains for fiber (which helps keep the stomach feeling full).
- 2. Don't go to a party hungry.** Think about the types of foods present at holiday parties - they may not always be the most healthful. If you go to a party hungry you are more likely to overeat.
- 3. Consume alcohol in moderation, if at all.** This tip has as much to do with common sense and safety as it does nutrition. For example, an 8-ounce glass of nonalcoholic eggnog contains more than 340 calories. Add alcohol to the eggnog and the calories increase to nearly 450. Plus, those calories from alcohol tend to be stored as fat.
- 4. Control calorie intake by ordering drinks with diet soda or club soda instead of juice and regular sodas.** A 12-ounce can of soda is about 150 calories; diet versions have around 2-4 calories and club soda is calorie-free.

5. **Socialize away from the food table.** This will reduce the temptation to overeat and allow you to focus on the great conversations you are having with your friends, family, and co-workers.
6. **If the party is an after-work cocktail party, curb your appetite by snacking on fruit, pretzels, crackers or low-fat yogurt before you go.** Again, this helps reduce the temptation to overeat.
7. **For office parties, try to get involved in the planning process to help ensure that some healthy foods will be available.** Offer to bring a fresh fruit or vegetable tray, baked tortilla chips and salsa, or pretzels. If you are offering to bring a dish that has been modified to lower the fat and calorie content, be sure to try out the dish at home in advance to make sure the taste is still acceptable.
8. **For dinner parties, skip dessert or choose fresh fruit if it is available.** If you are served a desert, eat half.
9. **Remember, smaller is better.** When the food at a party is being served buffet-style, make one trip through the buffet line and take only small amounts of the foods that you really like. If possible, use a salad plate so that your plate looks full (and thus your eyes won't feel cheated).
10. **Listen to your stomach and stop eating when you are no longer hungry.** Eating until one is full (i.e. stuffed like a Thanksgiving turkey) usually results in consuming more calories than we need.

Surviving the Holiday Season - Shopping

Shopping is a big part of the holiday season for many people. This often means spending more time at the mall or department store (and any food court that may be close by). Below are three tips to help control your calorie intake when shopping:

1. **Eat before going to the mall.** Shopping on an empty stomach may cause a person to overeat at lunch or even before.
2. **The holiday season is for sharing - this includes food.** Split meals and treats from the mall with a friend.
3. **Take a snack with you to the mall.** Fresh fruit like apples, bananas, small boxes or raisins or small bags of pretzels are handy snacks that transport well in a handbag or backpack. These snacks are healthier (and much cheaper) than the buttery pretzels and cookies often found throughout the malls.

Surviving the Holiday Season - Exercise!

No matter how festive, the holiday season can be a stressful time for people. Gifts to wrap, parties to attend and host, family and friends to visit can cause stress.

It is not uncommon for individuals to use food as a means of coping with stress. Furthermore, if we eat more calories than we use, we will gain weight. This means that regular physical activity is a must during the holiday season, not just for weight management but also for stress release. Taking a brisk walk after a meal and walking the aisles of the mall are just two ways to include physical activity into the daily routine. Have a pet? Remember he/she needs regular physical exercise as well so if you don't do it for yourself, do it for Fido or Fluffy.

A final note: Trying to lose weight during the holiday season is unrealistic. Instead of weight loss, consumers should focus on maintaining their weight. Depriving oneself of favorite or special foods during the holiday season is almost certain to result in overindulgence and unnecessary guilt. So, enjoy the season and all the wonderful foods that come with this special time. Again, the key is moderation and portion control.



Maintaining Your Weight During the Holiday Season



The holiday season brings many gifts including visits with families and friends and special foods. For some, weight gain is also a gift given by the holiday season. While the amount of weight gained by most adults is small, this is one gift that is not easily returned. In fact, research now suggests that the weight gained during the holiday season may be a factor contributing to the increase in body weight seen in adults. Below are some tips to help you watch your weight while during the holiday season.

- 1. Balance party meals with other meals.** Eat small meals with fewer calories during the day so you can enjoy the party without exceeding your calorie needs for the whole day.
- 2. Consume alcohol in moderation, if at all.** Alcohol offers little nutritional value and is a source of added calories.
- 3. Control calorie intake by choosing drinks with diet or club soda instead of juice or regular sodas.** A 12-ounce can of soda is about 150 calories. Diet sodas have about 2 calories and club soda is calorie-free.
- 4. Socialize away from the food table.** This reduces the urge to overeat and allows one to focus on socializing with friends, family, and co-workers.
- 5. If you go to a party hungry, you will be more likely to overeat.** Curb your appetite by snacking on fruit, pretzels, crackers or low-fat yogurt before you go.
- 6. For office parties, try to get involved in the planning process to help ensure that some healthy foods will be available.** Offer to bring a fresh fruit or vegetable tray, baked tortilla chips and salsa, or pretzels.
- 7. Smaller is better.** When the food is served buffet-style, make one trip through the buffet line and take only small amounts of the foods that you really like.
- 8. Listen to your stomach and stop eating when you are no longer hungry.** Eating until one is full (i.e. stuffed like a Thanksgiving turkey) often results in consuming more calories than we need.
- 9. Don't forget physical activity.** Physical activity is a great way to relieve stress and boost energy levels - something we all can use during the holiday season.

Trying to lose weight during the holiday season is unrealistic. Instead, focus on maintaining weight. Depriving oneself of special foods during the holiday season is almost certain to lead to overindulgence and unnecessary guilt. So enjoy the season and the special foods that you like during the holidays. Just use a little common sense and portion control.

Prepared by Jenna Anding, Ph.D., R.D., assistant professor & Extension nutrition specialist, 10/01. Educational programs of Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

Gifts to wrap, cookies to bake, and parties to attend. This can only mean one thing: the holiday season is upon us. Defined as the period of time between Thanksgiving and the start of the new year, the holiday season is often thought of as a time for weight gain due, in part, to the increase in parties and social events that usually involve food.

How much weight is gained during the average holiday season? According to Jenna Anding, Ph.D., R.D., assistant professor and Extension nutrition specialist with Texas Cooperative Extension, research suggests that the average amount of weight gained by adults during the holiday season is a little more than one pound, much less than the 5 to 8 pounds commonly believed. While this is good news for many, the research also suggests that this modest amount of weight gain is not lost after the holiday season. This may be one reason behind the increase in weight often seen during adulthood, notes Anding.

How can waist-watching consumers control weight gain during the holiday season? Anding advises consumers to focus on weight management instead of weight loss. Trying to lose weight during this time is unrealistic and can lead to frustration, overindulgence, and unnecessary guilt. If we can make it through the holidays without gaining weight, then that is positive outcome, adds Anding.

Holiday parties and social gatherings are opportunities for overeating. Since adults attend an average of 4 parties during the holiday season, managing intake at social gatherings is important in controlling holiday weight gain. To get through the holiday parties, Anding offers the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Balance party foods and meals with regular meals.** If you know you are going to a party later in the day and food is being served, eat small meals with fewer calories early in the day so you can enjoy the party without exceeding your calorie needs for the whole day, says Anding. On the other hand, try not to go to parties hungry as this can lead to overeating as well.
- ▶ **Consume alcohol in moderation, if at all.** This has as much to do with safety as with nutrition, since alcohol has no nutritional value and is a source of unneeded calories.
- ▶ **Choose drinks with diet or club soda instead of juice or regular sodas.** A 12-ounce can of soda is about 150 calories. Diet sodas have about 2 calories and club soda is calorie-free.
- ▶ **Socialize away from the food table.** This reduces the urge to overeat and allows one to focus on socializing with friends, family, and co-workers.
- ▶ **For office parties, try to get involved in the planning process to help ensure that some healthy foods will be available.** Offer to bring a fresh fruit or vegetable tray, baked tortilla chips and salsa, or pretzels.
- ▶ **Listen to your stomach and stop eating when you are no longer hungry.** Eating until one is full (i.e. stuffed like a Thanksgiving turkey) often results in consuming more calories than we need.

Last but not least, don't forget about physical activity. The holiday season can be stressful at times and physical activity is a great way to relieve stress and boost energy - something we all can use during the season. Taking a brisk walk after a meal and walking the aisles of the mall are just two ways to include physical activity into the daily routine.

Finally, Anding reminds us to remember the purpose of the holiday season and to enjoy the foods and festivities that surround this special time. Enjoy those favorite foods and treats - just do so in moderation.

For more information about controlling weight gain during the holiday season contact _____, county Extension agent at _____ (Phone number).

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