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Avoiding Weight Gain During The Holidays

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As people age, they gain weight at a rate of about one pound per year. Remember, too, that an increase of one pound per year works out to an excess of only 9.6 calories per day. To put that into perspective, two Snyder's mini-pretzels have about 11 calories. So it doesn't take much to gain one pound in a year. And an increase of one pound per year might not sound like much but over the course of a decade, that's an increase of 10 pounds.

When you really need to be on high alert for gaining weight is the holiday period from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. Several studies give us an idea as to what happens during the holidays.

In one study, researchers looked at a 10-week period starting with the two weeks before Thanksgiving and ending with the two weeks after New Year's Day. Three holiday weeks (Thanksgiving, Christmas/Hanukkah and New Year's Eve) were compared to the other seven non-holiday weeks. The 38 subjects in the study gained about 500% more weight per week—500% more weight! - during the holiday weeks than during the non-holiday weeks.

In another study, researchers looked at three periods: pre-holiday (from late September/early October to mid-November), holiday (mid-November to early/mid-January) and post-holiday (early/mid-January to late February/early March). The 195 subjects in the study gained about 1.1 pounds during this time frame. However, about 77% of the weight gain—about 0.81 pounds—occurred during the holiday period.

And in another study, researchers looked at the period from mid-September/mid-October to mid-January/early March. Of the 433 subjects in the study, nearly 63% gained at least 1.1 pounds during the holiday period; about 15% gained at least 4.4 pounds during the holiday period.

So there's plenty of compelling evidence—scientific and anecdotal—that a significant amount of weight gain typically occurs during the holiday season. Here are four tactics that you can employ to avoid this:

1. Have a small meal before attending a holiday function. For the most part, holiday gatherings are continuous helpings of food that culminates in an enormous feast. It's a good idea for you to eat a little bit of food prior to your arrival. Doing so will keep your hunger at bay and make it less likely that you'll overeat.
2. Stay away from the "food table" and serving area. When food is readily available and easily accessible, it's difficult to resist eating more than you should. It doesn't require much effort for you to grab second (or third) helpings. And don't forget something else about staying away from the food table and serving area: Out of sight, out of mind, out of mouth.
3. Eat soup and/or salad at the start of a meal. Because they're comprised mostly of water, soups and salads provide relatively few calories but give you a feeling of satiety (fullness). If you lead off with soup and/or salad, then you're less likely to consume as many calories during the remainder of your meal.
4. Bring a healthy dessert/snack. With many holiday functions, guests are asked to bring some type of dessert/snack. Well, there's nothing that says that you have to bring a traditional dessert/snack such as cakes, pies, cookies or potato chips. Instead, you can bring a healthy snack such as fruit, raw vegetables, whole grain crackers or pretzels. Hey, even if you're not asked to bring some type of dessert/snack, you can still show up with something that's healthy.

Bottom Line: You can avoid weight gain during the holidays by exercising restraint.

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