Surviving the Holiday Season: 
Controlling Holiday Weight Gain

According to the American Dietetic Association, the average holiday weight gain in America is one pound. One pound does not seem like very much, but statistics also show that the majority of people do not lose this pound throughout the rest of the year and then keep adding to it every year.

So many people let their health slide over the holidays and over eat, over drink, skip exercising and then complain that they have gained weight. Being aware of the fact that the holidays are a challenging time to maintain a healthy lifestyle can help you plan ahead and be more conscious of your choices. The following tips provide ways for you to keep on track over the holidays:

- Keep a regular eating routine.
- Always grab a small snack before going to an event.
- Schedule exercise into your week.
- Concentrate on being social at events rather than eating.
- When eating out, don’t eat the bread, start off with a salad, and order fish if possible.
- At parties make the healthiest choices you can and do not go back for seconds.
- When visiting others, try to bring some healthy foods, or go shopping when you get there.
- If healthy dishes are not available, just make sure to watch your portion sizes.
- Take advantage of evenings when nothing is planned and prepare a healthy home cooked meal.
- Be careful of increased alcohol calories because those add up quick (Gans, 2010).

“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” (Texas Cooperative Extension, 2001).
Healthy Eating over the Holidays

Food is an important part of the holiday season so enjoy special foods while keeping a balanced and healthy diet. Registered Dietitian, Gail Zyla says “a lot of people go hog wild for the entire month of December. If people were a little more relaxed about it and a little more forgiving, they wouldn’t feel the need to go nuts and then get rigid in January.” Zyla encourages people to relax and remind themselves “this isn’t the last time that I’m going to be able to eat a cookie, or have some pie, or eat a little gravy. That way they don’t overdo it because they don’t feel they’re stockpiling for the whole next year” (Lindner, 2009).

Mypyramid.gov provides several tips on holiday eating:

- **Choose Well**—there are no good and bad foods, only good and bad eating habits. What matters most is the total amount and types of food you eat over several days.
- **Take Control**—Before a holiday event, eat a snack or light meal. Foods high in protein help you to eat less later.
- **Keep Your Balance**—eat tempting holiday foods, but use a bit of restraint. Eat small portions to keep yourself from indulging too much.
- **Washing it Down**—what you drink during the holidays can add a lot of calories and very little nutrition to your diet.
- **Play it Smart**—eat smaller portions, eat slowly, go for a walk, bring a low-calorie dish to holiday parties, avoid fast food, be realistic” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2006).

Holiday Shopping

Shopping is a big part of the holiday season for many people. This means spending more time running errands, and going to the mall, retail stores, and grocery stores. Spending so much time out and about makes it more difficult to eat healthy. Here are some tips to control your calorie intake when out shopping:

- **Plan ahead**—when you know you are going to be spending a lot of time shopping or running errands, decide before you leave the house what you are going to eat for the day and bring some food with you.
- **Eat before going shopping**—shopping on an empty stomach can cause a person to overeat at mealtime or snack more. It can also result in purchasing more food at the grocery store.
- **Split meals**—restaurant portion sizes are generally large enough to serve two or more people. Split your meal with a friend or family member, or take half of it home.
- **Bring a snack**—there are many healthy, cheap snacks that you can bring with you to prevent snacking on the high calorie, high fat, high sugar snacks found throughout the mall and quick food stops. Try bringing fresh fruit, raisins, or pretzels.

All of this extra errand running and shopping does not have to be a reason for weight gain over the holidays. Make an effort to keep your nutrition in check throughout the hustle and bustle of the season. (Texas Cooperative Extension, 2001)
Holiday Exercise

It is cold and snowy out, and it’s a busy and stressful time of year which makes it so hard to stay on track with an exercise routine. However, this is also the time of year where the most calories are consumed. This means that regular physical activity is even more important to avoid weight gain. Try the following tips to keep exercise a priority over the holiday season:

- **Schedule time into your day for exercise** - actually write your workouts on your calendar
- **Be flexible** - instead of cancelling your 5p.m. gym workout because of an office party, wake up an hour early and workout before work, or during your lunch hour.
- **Mix up your routine** - adding new exercise can be a strong motivator and help avoid boredom
- **Combine exercise and family commitments** - take the family snowshoeing, cross country skiing, or sledding
- **Create a home workout routine** so you can still workout even if you can’t make it to the gym (Sorgen, 2008)
- **Set short-term and long-term goals** - try writing down what you want to accomplish during the two month period from Nov. 20-Jan. 20. Make it a personal goal unrelated to the holidays.
- **Get a workout partner** - sometimes working out with a partner can be a great motivator and help keep you consistent
- **Train for an event or sport** knowing you need to be physically ready for an event may help keep you consistent with your workouts (Wood, 2010)

Reducing Holiday Stress

“Dashing through the snow
In a mindless fit of fray
Through the malls we go
Rushing all the way.
Horns on Hondas blast
We have to get home fast!
What fun it is to bake and wrap
Thank God it doesn’t last!!
Jingled nerves, jingled nerves, jingle all the way…” (Scholten, 2010).

The holiday season can be a very stressful time for some. However, with some preparation and creativity, the stress can be reduced. The following are a few ways to reduce the holiday stress in your life:

- **Plan ahead and prioritize** - sit down with your family and come up with a list of things you would like to do over the holidays. Prioritize the events that mean the most and set a budget.
- **Clarify your values** - determine what is most important to you; is it spending money or time? Do you take time to enjoy the season?
- **Simplify** - wrap presents early, cut back on baking, draw names instead of buying for everyone, and delegate tasks.
- **Take care of your health** - get plenty of sleep, exercise regularly, eat a well balanced diet, limit alcohol, take time to unwind.
- **Don’t forget the joy** - enjoy the people in your life, and seek out simple joys with family & friends. (Scholten, 2010)
Chipotle Spiced Shrimp
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1/2 pound uncooked shrimp, peeled and deveined (about 32 shrimp)
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 1/2 teaspoons water
- 1/2 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon chipotle chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh oregano, chopped

Directions
Rinse shrimp in cold water. Pat dry with a paper towel and set aside on a plate.

To make the marinade, whisk together the tomato paste, water and oil in a small bowl. Add garlic, chili powder and oregano. Mix well.

Using a brush, spread the marinade (it will be thick) on both sides of the shrimp. Place in the refrigerator.

Prepare a hot fire in a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill or broiler (grill). Away from the heat source, lightly coat the grill rack or broiler pan with cooking spray. Position the cooking rack 4 to 6 inches from the heat source.

Put the shrimp in a grill basket or on skewers and place on the grill. Turn the shrimp after 3 to 4 minutes. The cooking time varies depending on the heat of the fire, so watch carefully.

Transfer to a plate and serve immediately.

Nutrition Facts:
Serving Size: 8 shrimp
- Calories 73
- Protein 12 g
- Carbohydrates 3 g
- Total fat 2 g
- Cholesterol 85 mg
- Sodium 151 mg
- Fiber 1 g
- Potassium 199 mg

(Mayo Clinic, 2007)

**View more healthy holiday recipes at: [http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/holiday-recipes/NU00645]**

REFERENCES:
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