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10 Ways to Lose Weight During the Holidays

By Dr. Theresa Tsingis



As the days shorten and weather becomes cooler, there is a natural tendency, probably borne of mammalian instinct, to hibernate slightly, eat more and spend less time outdoors. It also happens to be holiday time, which encourages the same set of activities, all of which can cause weight gain. How can you beat the holiday weight gain blues? We have some research-based suggestions for success:

1) Plan Your Indulgences - Eat before going to a party. Just a small balanced, healthy snack will leave room for the party food. With stabilized energy, it's easier to not overeat.

2) Take small portions of what you most want to eat - and skip the lesser quality foods. Serve yourself a small amount of the higher calorie foods that you crave on that buffet table, along with plenty of vegetables and fruits. Or, given the choice between a candy bar or a high quality chocolate, go for the good stuff (just less of it).

3) Do Not Skip Meals - The usual party strategy is to not eat much until that evening's event. The resultant low blood sugar level causes the liver to dip into muscle stores for energy. That evening, overeating occurs due to hunger, and the liver stores the excess intake as fat. (This is also called the "Sumo wrestler's diet," because as you guessed it, this type of eating causes weight gain). Eating every 4 hours keeps hunger and cravings at bay.

4) Eat more slowly - The brain communicates satiation to the stomach if given the chance. Most Americans have finished a meal and cleared the table before those signals (which take about 20 minutes) have been sent.

5) Learn when to stop eating - French women use this as their dieting strategy, and it works. Most people fill their plates to an already-accustomed level, and then eat what they served themselves. The French either under-serve themselves food, and/or deliberately leave food on their plate. Hence, they eat the foods they like, but small portions of them (they also interact a lot during a meal, which slows down their eating speed).

6) Hide the food - In his book "Mindless Eating", researcher Brian Wansink

found that leaving snacks out in the open caused 71% more consumption of those snacks! Apparently visual clues stimulate the brain's hunger center, creating the "See-Food" diet. Every time we see food, we have to decide whether or not we want to eat it. Out of sight, out of mind, holds true here.

7) Use small plates and bowls - Wansink's research lab tested the effect of bowl size on consumption, and discovered that people using large server ware ate up to 59% more than those using smaller dishes and bowls. Large server ware makes regular portions look so small that it's natural to compensate by overfilling and hence, overeating. One of their studies found that even masters-level nutrition grad students (who'd attended many lectures on bowl size and increased consumption), unconsciously overate when exposed to high volumes of food. Set your table for reasonable-sized eating, and it will happen.

8) Stay hydrated - Have you ever had a craving for ice cream, when you were really only thirsty? Dehydration may activate both the thirst and hunger centers of the brain, since natural foods such as fruits and vegetables contain a fair amount of water. Drink water, stay thinner.

9) Drink from taller glasses - Similar to food, beverages trick the eye depending on what they are served in. Think tall, thin glasses. A diet camp's experiment found that campers who were allowed to pour their drinks into short, wide glasses poured 74% more than their tall-glass buddies. The brain via the eye, measures the volume of what one is to consume. A tall glass tricks the eye, giving the impression of a higher volume. Bartenders know this and use it to their advantage; so can you.

10) Stay active - Exercising early in the morning tends to result in the most success. If you can, find a buddy to whom you commit meeting 4 - 5 times weekly, and stick with it. A 1 hour walk is an ideal way to get fresh air, some vitamin D on the skin, improve circulation and energy, and prevent weight gain.

It's much easier to avoid gaining those holiday 5 pounds than to take them off next year. At Lamorinda Nutrition we help people stay on track with good nutrition and long term health goals through the holidays. We're offering a 10% discount on a new patient first appointment if scheduled before December 1st. Call us at (925) 254-1080 for an appointment.

Dr. Theresa Tsingis, D.C., M.S, maintains a nutrition practice at 89 Davis Rd., #180, Orinda. She specializes in weight loss, digestive and hormonal disorders, and children's nutrition.

Dr. Tsingis can be reached at drtsingis@comcast.net
or (925) 360-2729.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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