



HOLIDAY WEIGHT AND HOW TO AVOID IT

by Doreen Lerner, PhD

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THE HOLIDAYS MANY THINGS COME TO MIND – GIFTS, SHOPPING, PARTIES, FAMILY, DECORATING, LONG TO-DO LISTS AND DELICIOUS HOLIDAY TREATS.

STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING HOLIDAY WEIGHT GAIN

The holiday season is a busy time, and there are eating opportunities everywhere we go, such as family gatherings, office parties with trays of home-baked treats in the

lunchroom, holiday and end-of-semester programs at our kids' schools, treat samples being given away as we make our way through the stores to do our holiday shopping and catalogs in our mailboxes with mouth-watering photo spreads on every page. We're really busy, perhaps too busy to prepare the healthy meals we might otherwise prepare.

Here are a few tips that will help you negotiate this joyful time with minimum risk to your weight management goals:

- **Focus on maintaining your current weight.** Challenging yourself to lose weight over the holidays is setting yourself up for failure.
- **Don't gorge on any special holiday food because you only get to eat it once a year.** With luck, you'll still be around to enjoy it next year. On the other hand, don't deprive yourself of anything you want to taste. Instead, take a mindful bite, savoring the sight, taste, aroma, mouth feel and sound of each special holiday treat. Eating like this leads to increased pleasure, quicker satisfaction and decreased risk for weight gain.
- **Avoid the trap of thinking you can eat what you want because you can just start over in the New Year.** It doesn't get any easier just because it's January – there are always other reasons to indulge and to celebrate.
- **Keep up your exercise routine.** This will also help reduce holiday stress.
- **Keep tabs on yourself.** Write down what you eat, weigh yourself if you want to or try on your favorite clothes to make sure they still fit.
- **Create meaning beyond the food by creating new traditions that have nothing to do with food.** For example, change “in our family we always have chocolate cinnamon bread with whipped cream on Christmas morning” into “in our family we always play in the snow (or on the beach), or go for a long walk/take food and gifts to the homeless shelter on Christmas morning.”
- **Sometimes, eating a particular food is our way of remembering a lost loved one.** If that applies to you, find another way to remember them, like sharing memories with family members.
- **Remember all the reasons why reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is important to you.**
- **Remember, unless you're an elite athlete, you're unlikely to be able to “exercise off” weeks of overindulgence.**



STRATEGIES FOR HOLIDAY PARTIES

Most of us love holiday parties and look forward to them all year. We get to dress up and go to nice places, spend time with our nearest and dearest, enjoy our favorite holiday music and engage in the traditions that are meaningful to us. Despite all of the excitement, parties can also be minefields when it comes to honoring our healthy lifestyle goals. When we love parties, we may over-indulge as a way of intensifying the positive emotions we're already feeling, and when we dislike parties, we may over-indulge in an effort to distract ourselves from the emotional discomfort that we're feeling.

Here are a few tips that will help you get through holiday parties without sabotaging your goals:

- Avoid wearing baggy clothing that allows you to expand as you eat.
- After you've eaten, stay away from the food tables at the party.
- Keep your hands busy by finding a way to help out. It's the best way to distract yourself from the food.
- Avoid alcohol. When we drink, we're more likely to abandon healthy eating.
- Fill up with water and other low-calorie drinks.
- Take a healthy dish for the pot luck – something you can eat: consider salad, fruit, raw vegetables and a healthy dip.
- Focus on your relationships, not on the food - learn to focus on enjoying the people and the special holiday experiences, on building special memories for yourself and your family.
- Meeting new people is another good way of distracting yourself from the food. If you're shy, simply be a good listener.
- Plan ahead. The best kind of plan, when it comes to food, is about what you are going to eat – not about what you're not going to eat. If we focus on what we can't eat (or what we think we shouldn't eat), this kind of thinking can set us up for failure because it simply leaves us feeling deprived.
- Don't arrive completely famished – you'll be more likely to eat in a way you'll later regret. Plan to eat on the light side both before and after the event. Think about your meal plan for the day, and leave yourself some room to eat at the party.

COPING WITH HOLIDAY STRESS

As you know, the holiday season can be joyful and stressful at the same time. There's so much to do, being around family can sometimes be difficult and often, we set ourselves the goal of creating the "perfect" holiday. Being stressed puts us at risk for stress-based eating in an effort to cope.

Here are some strategies you can use to reduce your stress levels:

- Focus on what you're grateful for.
- Practice deep breathing whenever you feel overwhelmed.
- Keep up your exercise routine.
- Remind yourself to do just one thing at a time.
- Remember — you cannot do more than your best.
- Be willing to say "no" to some events, tasks or requests. Sometimes this is the best way we can take care of ourselves.
- Create a holiday season schedule for yourself. Schedule and prioritize everything you need to get done.
- Reduce your expectations – aim for "good enough," not "perfect."
- If you're alone during the holidays, pamper yourself and find a way to help others who are less fortunate. This will help reduce your loneliness.
- If your relationships with family members are strained, remember that over-indulging in your favorite holiday comfort foods is not going to change how they behave towards you!
- Create fun times for yourself. Having fun is a great way of reducing stress!

I hope these tips will help you not just get through the holidays, but that they'll allow you to feel reassured that you can still have a fun and meaningful time without having to sacrifice your weight management goals. Wishing you a happy, healthy and meaningful holiday season!

About the Author:

Doreen Lerner, PhD, is the Psychologist/Director for the Institute for Lifelong Weight Management. To receive Dr. Lerner's free report, "The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Losers," visit www.thefullmindweigh.com/infoguidelandingpage.html.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



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LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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info@obesityaction.org

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