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Health & Beauty: What Are You "Weighting" For?

BY JENNIFER L. NELSON - (201) MAGAZINE BERGEN.COM

HAVE YOU READ?

Thanks to countless cocktail parties, bountiful family dinners and decadent sweets, the average American gains eight pounds from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day – which means consuming an extra 28,000 calories in a matter of just six weeks.



Helaina

Piling up your plate with holiday favorites can lead to piling on the pounds, but that doesn't mean you should resign yourself to bigger clothes come January. Bergen County nutrition experts say you can keep off those

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The first step: Stop referring to the weeks surrounding Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year's Eve as "the holidays," says Erin Spitzberg, registered dietitian, certified nutritionist and owner of Nutrition By Design in Oradell.

"Don't look at every office party or gathering with friends or family as a time to splurge and chalk it up to the holidays," Spitzberg says. "You will almost guarantee going up a size by the spring. The biggest mistake is thinking that it's acceptable to take a six-week vacation from your eating and exercise regimen just because it's the holiday season."

That doesn't mean skipping out on Thanksgiving dinner at Mom's or staying in on New Year's Eve. It may be impossible to maintain your normal exercise routine when the in-laws are in town or weekends are spent scavenging the mall for the perfect presents for everyone on your list. That's why Julie Balay, a registered dietitian in Cresskill, advises modifying your healthy lifestyle to accommodate the demands of the season – and keeping your expectations in check.

"You have to be realistic," she says. "It's going to be hard to lose weight this time of year, or to avoid eating all of the not-so-healthy foods served at parties or holiday dinners."

If you can't squeeze in your usual 30- to 60-minute gym sessions, aim for shorter bursts of activity throughout the day, whether it's taking a break from wrapping gifts to jump rope, going for a short walk or jog while the pies are baking, or challenging your nieces and nephews to a boxing match on the Wii.

If you have your sights set on maintaining your current weight – while still savoring a slice of Mom's famous pecan pie – rest assured it can be done. First identify your must-have splurges, and then plan ahead. If it's just not Christmas without baking sugar cookies with your kids, plan to savor one or two before packing up the rest as gifts for family and friends.

"When you're confronted with a food, ask yourself if the calories are really worth it," Balay advises. "Save your indulgences for your absolute favorite treats that only come around once a year, and enjoy them in moderation."

Budget calories ahead of time with a healthy breakfast (think filling fiber, like oatmeal) and a salad loaded with veggies for lunch before Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner.

"You never want to fast all day before heavy holiday meals," Balay says. "If you're starving by the time you arrive to a party, you are going to overeat."

Above all, don't hide the scale in the closet for six weeks or conveniently lose your gym membership card until after New Year's Day. Whether you maintain a food journal, frequent your favorite weight loss message boards or step on the scale once a week, don't let unwanted pounds creep up on you.

"Holidays or not, you have to continue eating well and exercising – even if you have to modify your routine," Spitzberg says. "For most people, accountability is key."

Beverage Blitz

Food isn't the only diet and exercise saboteur this season: Most holiday meals come complete with cocktails that are high in calories and short on nutritional value. Skip sugary mixed drinks in favor of things like wine or a

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stay hydrated and lessen the caloric impact.

"The more we drink," Spitzberg says, the less we care about what we're eating – and the less likely we are to go to the gym the next morning."

TIPS FOR TURKEY DAY

Before you gobble up Thanksgiving dinner, try these tips to lessen the impact on the scale:

- 1. Skip the Apps.** Save your calories for the main meal.
- 2. Lose the Leftovers.** Don't take anything home from a party; if you're hosting a holiday meal, pack up leftovers for your guests.
- 3. Make Hard Choices.** Determine your favorite splurges ahead of time, whether it's sweet potato casserole or apple pie, and enjoy small helpings of only what you love most.
- 4. Trick Your Eye.** Whenever possible, serve holiday meals on salad plates.
- 5. Forget Fasting.** A surefire way to overeat is to show up starving, so eat sensibly before the big meal.
- 6. Squeeze It In.** A workout, that is. Register for a turkey trot, wake up early for a 30-minute gym session or catch up with your cousins over a pre-dinner walk.

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