



THE PLAIN DEALER

Nutrition hazards lay in wait for careless

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Cinda Williams Chima
University of Akron

I'd really like to make it through the holidays without packing on my usual 5 to 10 pounds. What are the biggest nutrition pitfalls of this festive season?

Studies show that the weight we gain during the last six weeks of the year tends to stay with us for life. Here's a "top 10" list of nutrition mistakes that can weigh heavy on the scale during those dark months after the winter solstice.

10. Failing to make a plan.

If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten: extra pounds. Say to yourself, "I'm going to eat whatever I want at the Smith's party where the food is to-die-for, but I'm going to stick with my plan the rest of the week."

9. Starving yourself on the day of the big party.

Sure, it makes sense to compensate by eating lightly the day before and after. But arrive ravenous, and you'll leave stuffed with high-calorie party food and drink.

8. Drinking your way into a new dress size.

Beverages can add hundreds of calories to an evening, and they don't fill us up. Pace yourself. If you're really thirsty, drink water, diet soda or unsweetened iced tea.

7. Succumbing to food pushers and diet saboteurs.

If you've never learned to say "no" to Grandma, it's time. Or say "yes," then leave the pie behind the potted palm.

6. Giving traditional food gifts of cookies and candy.

It keeps you in the kitchen, and you might be sabotaging someone else's weight plan. Ask before giving food. Consider healthier food items: fruit baskets, homemade soup, bread mixes or flavored vinegars. Or give the gift of time instead. Offer to do baby-sitting or transport a relative to a mall for a winter walk.

5. Thinking like a defeatist.

You overdid it on Thanksgiving. So you decide you're worthless, have no self-control and forget weight control until mid-January. Big mistake. It takes 3,500 excess calories to gain a pound. It's difficult to do that much damage in a day. Forgive yourself; go back to the plan.

4. Squandering calories on mediocre food.

If you don't even like eggnog, for heaven's sake don't drink it just for the sake of ritual. It contains about 450 calories and 24 grams of fat per cup - and that's before you add rum.

3. Celebrating the 42 days of Christmas.

You don't gain weight from what you eat on just Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Eve. You gain when you go into holiday grazing mode as soon as the Halloween decorations go, or for the entire season from Thanksgiving through Epiphany. A handful of sugared pecans here, three pieces of fudge there - before you know it, it's showing up on the scales.

2. Forgoing exercise for the 42 days.

You figure, "I'm busy." The last thing you want to do the morning after the office party is to roll out of bed and get on that stepper. Just do it. A National Institutes of Health study suggests that people who are most active over the holidays gain the least weight.

And the No. 1 reason. . .

1. Over-focusing on food.

It's not all about the food. (OK, it's a lot about the food.) But if all of your family traditions revolve around food, create some new ones. Attend programs at a nearby church. Go caroling. Organize a sledding party. Volunteer at a nursing home. Take a hike in the Metroparks on Christmas afternoon.

Have a joyous holiday and a healthy New Year!

Chima is a registered dietitian on the University of Akron faculty.

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