

# Top 10 List to Prevent Holiday Weight Gain

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Holidays are stressful enough without worrying about weight gain, but that's no excuse to stuff yourself with holiday goodies.

A recent report from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) indicates that Americans gain only about one pound between Thanksgiving and New Year's. The 195 volunteers in the study were asked about several factors that might influence weight changes, such as stress, hunger, activity level, changes in smoking habits, or number of holiday parties attended. The researchers found that only two factors influence weight gain: level of hunger and level of activity.

In addition, researchers found that the volunteers believed they had gained much more weight than they actually had during the study—fewer than 10 percent gained more than five pounds. However, overweight and obese volunteers were more likely to gain five pounds than those who were not overweight.

Problems result when added weight isn't lost before the next event that offers an excuse for overeating. Over time those extra pounds contribute to the obesity epidemic.

Putting your focus on maintaining a balance of physical activity and food intake is one of the healthiest approaches to the

holidays because it reduces the emphasis on food. Physical activity also is a proven way to reduce stress.

## **1. Plan holiday celebrations around activities**

Start a tradition of ice skating, sledding, or skiing as part of the holiday celebration. Park and walk to view neighborhood lighting displays instead of riding around in your car.

## **2. Concentrate on quality, not quantity**

What are the special food(s) you associate with the season? Concentrate on preparing or sampling only one or two special foods at each holiday celebration. Keep your portions in proportion!

## **3. Give yourself the gift of planned physical activity**

Make it a priority by scheduling daily activity into your routine. Physical activity is an effective method for preventing weight gain during the holidays by burning calories, suppressing appetite, and helping deal with stress. Physical activity is the common denominator for losing weight and keeping it off. Current recommendations are to walk 10,000 steps, or about five miles, a day.

## **4. Never skip meals before or after a big celebration**

This practice creates a famine-feast-famine cycle. To prevent

overeating at holiday celebrations drink a large glass of water before you eat, don't stand near a food-laden table, place food on a plate rather than eating straight from the buffet, and don't eat while standing.

## **5. Put eating in perspective**

Overeating at one meal does not spell catastrophe. But using it as a "mistake" that allows you to forget about walking or later food choices will make it become a catastrophe.

Remember that your attitude is your strongest asset when it comes to managing your dietary and physical activity habits during the holidays, in addition to managing your stress.

## **6. Spend less time in the kitchen**

Do you really need to make dozens of different cookies, candies or breads? If so, consider modifying recipes for baked products by reducing the fat and sugar by one-third. (For details, see [www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/NCR473a.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/NCR473a.pdf))

## **7. Rethink the food gifts you give**

Consider replacing your usual box of homemade candies for the neighbors with an assortment of fresh or dried fruits and nuts, a loaf of whole grain bread, or a jar of your special pancake mix. Try your hand at a craft or give an IOU for a service, such as car washing, babysitting, or lawn work.

### **8. Go to the back of the line**

Let others go before you in serving and buffet lines; tempting items may be gone by the time you go through. Practice being a slow eater. Give your brain 20 minutes to tell your stomach that you are satisfied before going back for seconds.

### **9. Get adequate sleep**

Chronic sleep loss may affect various components of metabolism that influence hunger and weight gain. Being tired also affects your mental ability to resist temptations.

### **10. Plan ahead**

Schedule time for yourself and physical activity on a daily basis; prioritize holiday celebrations to attend; schedule weekly family activities; be adventurous with new fruits, vegetables, and physical activities.

### **For additional resources, visit these Web sites:**

*ISU Extension Nutrition*  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition)

*National Institutes of Health*  
[www.nichd.nih.gov/new/releases/holidayweightgain.cfm](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/new/releases/holidayweightgain.cfm)

*Food and Nutrition Information Center*  
[www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/holiday.html](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/holiday.html)

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