

## November newsletter from your healthcare providers Canterbury Wellness Center

This month we have decided to focus on preparing our patients for the holiday season. Bringing you tips on how to avoid putting on those extra pounds from November to January, and dealing with holiday stress (and very commonly depression) that many patients experience during this season.

### Top 10 List to Prevent Holiday Weight Gain From the nutrition department at Iowa State University

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.

**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:

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: <http://www.nutrition.gov/>

Prepared by Ruth Litchfield, Ph.D., R.D., extension nutritionist; and Diane Nelson, extension communication specialist.

### [Stress, depression and the holidays: 12 tips for coping](#) From the Mayo Clinic ([www.MayoClinic.com](http://www.MayoClinic.com))

**Stress and depression can ruin your holidays and hurt your health. Being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support can help ward off stress and depression.**

For some people, the holidays bring unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. In an effort to pull off a perfect Hallmark holiday, you might find yourself facing a dizzying array of demands — work, parties, shopping, baking, cleaning, caring for elderly parents or kids on school break, and scores of other chores. So much for peace and joy, right?

Actually, with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress and depression that often accompany the holidays. You may even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you would.

#### **The trigger points of holiday stress and depression**

Holiday stress and depression are often the result of three main trigger points. Understanding these trigger points can help you plan ahead on how to accommodate them.

The three main trigger points of holiday stress or depression:

- **Relationships.** Relationships can cause turmoil, conflict or stress at any time. But tensions are often heightened during the holidays. Family misunderstandings and conflicts can intensify — especially if you're all thrust together for several days. Conflicts are bound to arise with so many different personalities, needs and interests. On the other hand, if you're facing the holidays without a loved one, you may find yourself especially lonely or sad.
- **Finances.** Like your relationships, your financial situation can cause stress at any time of the year. But overspending during the holidays on gifts, travel, food and entertainment can increase stress as you try to

make ends meet while ensuring that everyone on your gift list is happy. You may find yourself in a financial spiral that leaves you with depression symptoms such as hopelessness, sadness and helplessness.

- **Physical demands.** The strain of shopping, attending social gatherings and preparing holiday meals can wipe you out. Feeling exhausted increases your stress, creating a vicious cycle. Exercise and sleep — good antidotes for stress and fatigue — may take a back seat to chores and errands. High demands, stress, lack of exercise, and overindulgence in food and drink — all are ingredients for holiday illness.

## 12 tips to prevent holiday stress and depression

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if you know the holidays have taken an emotional toll in previous years.

Tips you can try to head off holiday stress and depression:

1. **Acknowledge your feelings.** If a loved one has recently died or you aren't able to be with your loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness or grief. It's OK now and then to take time just to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
2. **Seek support.** If you feel isolated or down, seek out family members and friends, or community, religious or social services. They can offer support and companionship. Consider volunteering at a community or religious function. Getting involved and helping others can lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. Also, enlist support for organizing holiday gatherings, as well as meal preparation and cleanup. You don't have to go it alone. Don't be a martyr.
3. **Be realistic.** As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Hold on to those you can and want to. But accept that you may have to let go of others. For example, if your adult children and grandchildren can't all gather at your house as usual, find new ways to celebrate together from afar, such as sharing pictures, e-mails or videotapes.
4. **Set differences aside.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all your expectations. Practice forgiveness. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. With stress and activity levels high, the holidays might not be conducive to making quality time for relationships. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
5. **Stick to a budget.** Before you go shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend on gifts and other items. Then be sure to stick to your budget. If you don't, you could feel anxious and tense for months afterward as you struggle to pay the bills. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Donate to a charity in someone's name, give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.
6. **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make one big food-shopping trip. That'll help prevent a last-minute scramble to buy forgotten ingredients — and you'll have time to make another pie, if the first one's a flop. Expect travel delays, especially if you're flying.
7. **Learn to say no.** Believe it or not, people will understand if you can't do certain projects or activities. If you say yes only to what you really want to do, you'll avoid feeling resentful, bitter and overwhelmed. If it's really not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
8. **Don't abandon healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a dietary free-for-all. Some indulgence is OK, but overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Have a healthy snack before holiday parties

so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Continue to get plenty of sleep and schedule time for physical activity.

9. **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Steal away to a quiet place, even if it's to the bathroom for a few moments of solitude. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Listen to soothing music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.
10. **Rethink resolutions.** Resolutions can set you up for failure if they're unrealistic. Don't resolve to change your whole life to make up for past excess. Instead, try to return to basic, healthy lifestyle routines. Set smaller, more specific goals with a reasonable time frame. Choose only those resolutions that help you feel valuable and that provide more than only fleeting moments of happiness.
11. **Forget about perfection.** Holiday TV specials are filled with happy endings. But in real life, people don't usually resolve problems within an hour or two. Something always comes up. You may get stuck late at the office and miss your daughter's school play, your sister may dredge up an old argument, your partner may burn the cookies, and your mother may criticize how you're raising the kids. All in the same day. Accept imperfections in yourself and in others.
12. **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for several weeks, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. You may have depression.

### **Take back control of holiday stress and depression**

Remember, one key to minimizing holiday stress and depression is knowing that the holidays can trigger stress and depression. Accept that things aren't always going to go as planned. Then take active steps to manage stress and depression during the holidays. You may actually enjoy the holidays this year more than you thought you could.