

HOLIDAY PITFALLS

By Jeffrey Kinnunen MS, Exercise Specialist

The holiday season in the United States that begins with Thanksgiving and ends with New Year's Day is notorious for weight gain, with a typical increase of 5 to 10 pounds. A relapse in lifestyle changes also tends to occur more during the holiday season than in any other time of the year. Several contributing factors include holiday-related stress, outdoor activities curbed due to weather, busy schedules that don't allow time for exercise, and of course, the many high-calorie treats that seem to be everywhere.

However, the holiday season doesn't have to hurt the progress that you have made. In terms of exercise, first try to eliminate all-or-none thinking. Even if you don't have time to do your usual workout, anything is better than nothing. Setting aside at least 15 minutes for exercise everyday will at least help to maintain a little of your cardiovascular fitness, and you will find it much easier to get started again in January. Continuing to accumulate 30 minutes each day, for example walking for 10 minutes three times each day, will maintain a reduction in the risk for chronic illnesses like heart disease and diabetes.

Another common pitfall is over-indulging in high-calorie treats while thinking that exercise will offset the increased calories consumed. The reason that this doesn't work is that it is far easier to consume calories than to burn them. For example, if you cut an 8 inch commercially prepared pumpkin pie into 6 pieces and eat one piece dressed with regular whipped topping, you are getting about 252 calories. Walking at a speed of 3 miles per hour for 30 minutes does not offset this, and a 200 lb person will expend only 157 calories.

If you do fall victim to the common holiday pitfalls, don't allow yourself to be filled with anxiety about what you should be doing. Instead enjoy the time that you spend with friends and family, and get on track as soon as you can!