

Lose Weight Over the Holidays?

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The holidays are one of the hardest times to lose weight.
How can you improve your odds of being successful this year?

Why do I repeatedly fail to lose weight over the holidays?

- There are many reasons we fail to lose weight in spite of our best intentions:
- Your goal is unrealistic—e.g., trying to lose 20 lbs. during the two months in which the average weight gain is 2 to 11 lbs.
- Confusing your brain and body with ineffective directions such as "You have to lose 20 lbs. by New Year's."
- Emotional eating—using food as a drug to smooth loneliness, stress and sadness; as if telling your body and emotions, "Eat this and shut up."
- Trying to use will power and discipline—which pits one part of you against another part: "You shouldn't eat any pie" versus "But I deserve and love sweet potato pie with whipped cream."
- Self-criticism—"What's wrong with you? You always overeat and then regret it."
- Family meetings, during which stress and old habits abound.
- Denying your body's limits—failing to understand that your body is working for you like a faithful servant and dealing with many external and internal stressors. And aside from gaining weight, overeating to the point of obesity makes it vulnerable to diabetes, heart disease, and several cancers.
- Notice that your attempted solutions are the cause of most of the reasons you fail to lose weight. Examine what you've tried before and do the opposite. Become a more effective manager of your life by giving clear directives that your brain and body can grasp and act upon. Think of small, success-assured steps in the present rather than big goals in the future.

What you can do to be more effective in achieving your goals:

Effective goals: Make your future goal—for example, lose 20 lbs.—into *action steps* you can take everyday, such as "I will walk/exercise for 10 to 30 minutes everyday and will eat whole grains and fruit for breakfast and more salads and vegetables for lunch and dinner."

Clear directives: "I'm *choosing to start* drinking water instead of soda and to have fruit available for snacks everyday." That is, give your brain and body clear action steps to take today. "I'm choosing to savor my food rather than gobble it."

Accept your emotions: Think of your emotions as a crying infant you hold and comfort to quiet it down rather than feeding it sugar. Breathe through the first 10 to 15 seconds of your old impulse before you reach for a treat. Your body will learn that you're strong enough to be with your feelings rather than having to drug them with candy and fattening snacks.

Use structures and humility: Having made the point above, don't make the assumption that you're strong enough to resist a gallon of ice cream in your freezer or fresh cookies on your table. Acknowledge your vulnerability and keep temptations out of your home. Put the TV remote control in the basement or garage so you have to get up to change the channel or really think about whether you want to lose another evening or weekend sitting in that chair eating an additional thousand calories you don't need.

Praise all steps in the right direction: Criticism only evokes emotions that lead to emotional eating. Recognize and praise any small step that leads to exercising or having smaller meals with more vegetables and fruit. "I only gained 2 lbs. That's great. I'm below the national average. When can I get to the gym?"

Prepare for being with your family: Do a mental rehearsal of the possible comments and reactions that could lead you to seek solace by overeating. Know what you will say (to yourself and others) to avoid confrontations and pressure: "Thank you, I've had plenty and I'm savoring what's on my plate." Always be prepared to take a break to "get a breath of fresh air and digest this wonderful meal."

Protect your body: Take the empowered role of protecting your body from toxic substances and habits. Acknowledge that your body and brain can become addicted to fats, sugars, nicotine, drugs, and surfing the internet or watching TV. Protect your body (the way you would toward your child) so that you wouldn't think of feeding it poison even if it says, "But it's sweet and I want it." Take this faithful servant for a walk and feed it water and healthy foods and it will become stronger and serve you well into your advanced years.