



In Good Health Newsletter, December



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December
 Avoid Holiday Weight Gain
 Holiday Stress Management
 Toss Food Myths

How much weight does the average American put on over the holidays? Despite our worst fears, the average American really only puts on one pound during the holiday season — which doesn't sound like much, unless you gain that extra pound year after year.



- 1. Keep a fitness & nutrition journal** - Being conscious of your own activities can really help you make healthy decisions.
- 2. Teeter-Totter "Diet" and "Exercise"** - enjoy the special holiday events you attend, but counterbalance the extra caloric intake with an extra workout for the week.

- 3. Keep a Holiday Calendar** - Just because the holidays are a time to celebrate doesn't mean every day needs to be a celebration. Set aside one or two nights a week to really enjoy yourself, but stick to your usual routine the rest of the time.
- 4. Eat Conscientiously** - Studies have shown that people who sit in a well-lit location, take smaller bites, and chew their food thoroughly are less likely to overeat. You may not have the luxury of sitting down in a well-lit location during holiday festivities, but you can control how fast and how thoroughly you chew your food.

- 5. Recruit an Accountability Buddy** - Link up with a friend or family member who you can check in with daily to discuss your healthy choices.
- 6. Sign Up for a Holiday Fitness Competition** - Most gyms offer fitness competitions for members to help encourage healthy habits during the holiday season. Rather than New Year's-style weight-loss competitions, holiday competitions generally focus on accumulating total activity.

- 7. Start and End Each Day Strong** - Give yourself enough time each morning to cycle through a quick 10-minute resistance-training circuit and then spend 10 minutes at night performing some type of cardio. While 20 minutes of exercise a day doesn't meet the [American College of Sports Medicine's physical activity guidelines](#), it sets you on the right track and gets you moving.

- 8. Celebrate With Activity** - Create new holiday traditions with your family by choosing to engage in active celebrations. For instance, instead of driving around your neighborhood to look at all the Christmas lights, take a family walk.

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9. Turn Back the Clock - One day each week, pretend that you don't have the luxury of modern-day conveniences. Make meals from scratch instead of in the microwave, [ride your bike to work](#) instead of driving your car, and wash the dishes by hand instead of running them through the dishwasher.

**Tips
to Avoid Holiday Weight
Gain!**



10. Dial back on the booze - The fastest path to weight gain is to drink your way through the holidays. You'll consume [too many calories from booze](#) and you'll end up making bad food choices.

11. Skip starch, choose fruit - At each meal, choose fresh fruit instead of starchy side dishes like potatoes or rice. Most fruit is low in calories and has a high water content. You'll get full without consuming too many calories and you'll satisfy your sweet tooth at the same time.

12. Sign Up for a Holiday Fitness Competition Most gyms offer fitness competitions for members to help encourage healthy habits during the holiday season. Rather than New Year's-style weight-loss competitions, holiday competitions generally focus on accumulating total activity.

Sign Up for a Holiday Fitness Event Check local event listings to find running, walking, or cycling races in your area. If you sign up for an event, chances are you'll follow through on the necessary training. If you have children, look for events with a family friendly focus and get the entire gang involved.

13. Cut snacks in half - Snacks aren't a bad idea, but we often eat too much when we munch between meals. If you snack, cut each portion in half so that you consume fewer calories.

14. Host Your Own Party - The great thing about hosting your own holiday party is that you can control what foods and beverages you serve. Instead of white rolls and fruity, calorie-laden cocktails, you can stick to whole wheat rolls and wine.

15. Bring Your Own Dishes It's considered common courtesy to bring a side dish or two to a party. However, instead of bringing Christmas cookies or pie, bring a healthy salad or chocolate-covered strawberries. Fill your plate with the main course and your own side dishes and you'll know you're eating healthy.

16. Start With Soup or Salad - Studies have shown that you eat less during a single sitting if you start the meal off with a water-based soup or a green salad. If you don't think your hosts will serve soup or salad at their holiday event, eat some before heading out the door.

18. Only Eat What You Really Like - Studies have shown that people often overeat when they have more options available than when the options are limited. Don't rely on others to limit your options. Do it yourself by only eating the foods you really like.

19. Maintain Your Sleep Schedule - Just because you have more opportunities to stay up late and party doesn't mean you should. Go out and have fun, but call it quits early enough so that you can get plenty of sleep. Aim for at least seven hours of sleep each night.

21. Dress Your Best - It's really tempting to throw on baggy sweaters and loose pants this time of year, but wearing form-fitting clothes can actually make you pay more attention to what you eat and whether your body changes from week to week.

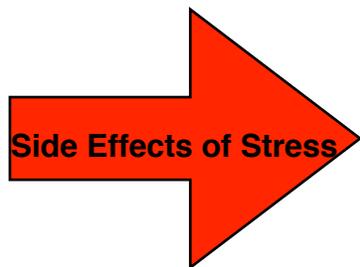
17. Trade Holiday Events for Eating Out - This holiday season, trade one special meal for another by substituting your holiday parties for your restaurant routine. If your work buddies have a holiday soiree, skip the fast food and bring a [brown bag lunch](#) that day. This doesn't mean you can go nuts when you hit the party, it just means that you have one more opportunity to balance your calorie intake during the holiday season.

20. Give Up On "Perfect" - Striving to make Christmas "perfect" for yourself or your family is a nice goal to have, but it creates a lot of pressure. Who needs that kind of stress? Go ahead and aim for "great," but realize that sometimes "good enough" ends up being a healthier option for you and everyone around you.

Holiday Stress Management

Polls show that almost 90% of Americans feel some kind of anxiety or stress about the holidays. The shopping, out-of-control [discretionary spending](#), decorating, cooking, visiting, and [holiday entertaining at home](#) can all add up and cause tremendous pressure on both adults and kids.

Stress has been linked to heart disease, cancer, depression, obesity, sleep problems, high blood pressure, digestive problems, chronic pain, migraines, anxiety, autoimmune diseases, and skin conditions, all of which can lead to major health expenses. It's also known to speed up the aging process.



- Frequent anger or agitation
- Feeling overwhelmed, sad or hopeless
- Moodiness, going from high to low
- Feeling lonely or isolated
- Constant worrying
- Feeling pessimistic
- Can't relax

You might also be experiencing physical or behavioral side effects, such as:

- Weight gain or weight loss
- Inability to sleep, or sleeping too much
- Neglecting your responsibilities
- Using alcohol or drugs to relax
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Chest pain or rapid heartbeat
- Frequent colds or little sicknesses from a weakened immune system
- Nausea or dizziness

Unplug One Day a Week - One day each week, take a digital vacation! Instead of watching TV, play with your kids. Instead of racing to answer your cell every time it rings, turn it off and read a book instead.

Force Yourself to Slow Down - If you find yourself rushing from task to task or errand to errand while your patience is running thin, force yourself to slow down. I'm serious. Ask yourself this: will the world end if I don't get this done? Will I even remember what this all-important task was a week from now? Much of the time, that answer will be a resounding "no."

Discover the Joys of Small Things - Do you have a Small Thing? A Small Thing is any small routine or activity that really makes you happy. It doesn't matter if it's reading the paper, assembling bouquets, working on a woodworking project, crocheting, or washing dishes; if it makes you happy, try to work more of that activity into your schedule, especially during the holidays.

Give - Slow down this year by giving to charity. Even better, get your family and friends involved and do it together. Here are some ideas:

- **Sponsor a needy family. Provide a tree, food, and gifts for their holiday. The Salvation Army, your local church, local school, or local food bank probably all have a list of families in need of sponsorship.**
- **Bring some homemade food or baked goods to your local hospice or nursing care facility.**
- **Bring toys to children in the long-term care ward at your local hospital.**

Holiday Stress Management

Reduce - Many parents feel the need to buy a ton of toys for their kids; they want every inch under the tree filled with presents. An easy solution? Buy a smaller tree. Choose a few presents with care. Go for quality over quantity.



Get Some Exercise - Exercise has been proven, time and time again, to lower stress level and increase serotonin (the chemical in our brains that make us happy).

Learn to Say “No” - You don’t have to hit every holiday party. You don’t have to go to your sister’s for New Year’s Eve if you don’t want to.

Have Realistic Expectations - Make the holidays what you want them to be, right now. Don’t put the bar so high that you make yourself miserable trying to reach it.

Don’t Over Indulge ‘Tis the season for holiday buffets, tins of cookies, and tables groaning under Christmas feasts. It’s really, really easy to overindulge during the holidays. Not only does this make us feel guilty, but it also makes our bodies and our minds feel sluggish and bad.



**Dump
the Food Myths This
Holiday Season!**

Carbohydrates Make Me Fat!

Diet marketing has been successful influencing how we feel about carbohydrates. Unfortunately, many of the claims are untrue. This food myth has become so extreme in some fad diets, carbs are left out completely. [Carbohydrates are an essential macronutrient](#) and primary source of energy for optimal health and fitness. This means the body requires lots of carbs to function at optimum levels. Contrary to what fad diets want you to believe, a diet rich in whole

I Should Only Eat Protein!

[Eating protein](#) above daily requirements or scientific recommendation may have adverse health effects in some cases. The body converts the excess protein or amino acids into ketones. Ketones are produced by the liver when too much protein is being used for energy. This process is taxing to the liver and kidneys and potentially a health risk. The body simply can't run on protein alone and requires carbohydrates and fats as primary energy sources. According to research, self-imposed protein-only diets are considered an [unsafe weight loss practice](#). [Protein intake will differ per person](#) and an important part of a nutrient dense balanced diet. Eating a wide variety of healthy foods from lean proteins, healthy carbs, and fats are required to reduce fat and gain muscle.

Food Myths

Eating Fat Will Make Me Fat!

Fats like carbohydrates have fallen prey to negative reviews causing many people to reject them like the plague. The problem is the type of fat people are consuming. Not all fat is created equal and eating fat doesn't make us fat. Our body requires healthy fat to function efficiently and even to lose fat. According to research, eating healthy fat helps with [weight loss](#) and maintaining a healthy heart. Dietary reference intakes recommend 20-35 percent of our daily calories should come from healthy fat.

Drinking Lots of Water is Not Healthy!

Drinking plenty of water is essential for a healthy body and proper hydration. We couldn't survive without water and it comprises over 60 percent of the human body. Drinking water is really a no-brainer and especially if you're in tune to thirst cues. If you're thirsty, your body is telling you to drink water. The body loves water and utilizes it at every physiological level from our cells to our blood, heart, lungs, and skin. Thinking of water as a necessary nutrient like food may help with increasing your water intake. Many health benefits from glowing skin to weight loss are related to staying hydrated.

Peppermint Fudge Energy Bites



A holiday spin on healthy no bake energy bites!

Author: Julie Wunder

Recipe type: Dessert

Cuisine: Healthy

Serves: 9 bites

Ingredients

- ½ cup cup raw almonds
- ⅓ cup pitted medjool dates (about 6)
- 1 tablespoon cocoa powder
- ¾ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅛ teaspoon peppermint extract
- 1 tablespoon coconut oil
- 1 tablespoon mini dark chocolate chips
- ½ cup crushed peppermint

- 1 Put almonds in a food processor and chop.
- 2 Add the dates and blend well.
- 3 Add the cocoa powder, vanilla extract, peppermint extract, and coconut oil. Blend for several minutes until starting to combine. Add a couple drops of water if necessary to help it move.
- 4 Add the chocolate chips and pulse a few final times to combine well. You don't want to pulverize the chocolate though.
- 5 Take a heaping teaspoon of the mixture in your hand and roll into a ball. The coconut oil will soften and it will be very messy. The warmth of your hand will allow the coconut oil to help bind the bite. You will end up pushing it more together than actually rolling it. While it is still warm press into the peppermint.
- 6 Allow the finished bites to set in the fridge for 30 minutes to re-solidify the coconut oil.