

## Here's how to avoid holiday bloat

Having more control of the future decreases personal "stress levels." This column won't do much to help you get more control over your job, finances, or relationships, but it can help you gain more control of your health and weight during the holiday season.

First and foremost, understand that being in charge of your weight really means controlling your body fat. Losing 5 to 10 pounds of body weight in a week means the weight loss is mostly from losses of body water and muscle, unless you ran a 26-mile marathon every day. This loss of lean body mass decreases a person's calorie requirements and increases the chances of future fat gain.

And yes, this is the first step to the "Yo-Yo Syndrome" of weight loss followed by gaining back a bit more than was lost. This leads to what we call the "Ratchet Syndrome."

Body fat gradually ratchets up over time since a little more fat is gained back than is lost with each bout of dieting.

To lose one pound of body fat (not just weight), you need to eat about 3,500 calories less than your body needs. For example, if your calorie needs equal 2,000 calories

per day and you eat nothing for a whole week, the most fat you could lose would be about 4 pounds.

However, during such a bout of starvation, you would lose more than 4 pounds of weight. The additional loss would be due to the loss of body water and muscle. This muscle loss occurs because your brain and nervous system require glucose. Without carbohydrate in the diet, your body breaks down muscle protein. Some of the amino acids that make up protein are converted to the valuable glucose, some are just used to supply energy to the body, and some can even be converted to fat. With some diets, you can actually lose weight due to muscle loss and gain some body fat at the same time.

As we enter the holiday season, you can spare yourself some Y2K body fat grief by focusing now on long-term weight maintenance or rational weight loss. This approach may be slower than others promise, but it will help you maintain weight over a lifetime rather than just a few months. Here are a few ideas to help you approach the millennium without putting holiday body fat loss on your New Year's resolutions.

1. Special occasion foods usually

contain significantly more calories and fat than normal fare. So, going to a party after fasting all day is not a good idea. You will be more likely to make a meal of these wonderful calorie-loaded treats that go down virtually without notice. The bottom line is that you will likely consume more calories and fat than if you ate a low-calorie meal before arriving at the party and then ate smaller portions of these festive foods.

2. Throughout the holidays, decrease the size of your normal meals. Instead of ordering a combo meal, order only the entree and drink. Sure, the combo meal is a better deal, but not when you include the expense and hassle to lose the fat gained from the "deal meals."

3. Include some exercise in every day. This can include just walking more. Research conducted in the 1950s by nutritionist Jean Mayer found that the appetite seems to be much more "in sync" with maintaining a normal level of body fat.

Next Wednesday: The "Less Fat, Still Ono" column will have recipes to help you control your weight through the holidays.

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