



Eat well for the holidays

It is less than a week before Christmas and life is anything but routine. You haven't finished Christmas shopping and still have a list of holiday cards to send. There are more holiday gatherings to attend than you can make. Amidst all this, finding time to exercise seems to be an impossible feat.

To top it off, the latest news reports that more than 61 percent of American adults are overweight or obese. Not sure where you fit in those statistics, you are committed to starting the new year at the same weight you were on Nov. 1.

Since holiday eating doesn't seem to fit into any of the "fad" reducing diet schemes, it would seem there is only one alternative. No, the answer is not skipping meals! Skipping meals may decrease the calories consumed, but also can decrease the amounts of essential nutrients and food components required to stay healthy.

Many of these nutrients, along with adequate protein, are needed to maintain a healthy immune system. This is especially important during the holidays when we encounter more people than usual along with more opportunities to exchange seasonal cold and flu viruses.

Nutrients and food components

most likely to be missing are the vitamins and minerals found in fruits and vegetables, especially vitamin C, as well as dietary fiber. You may think you can just take a dietary supplement, but don't be fooled by this seemingly simple approach to health and wellness.

So what is the solution to maintaining weight over the holidays? Replace your typical higher calorie food choices with foods that are nutrient dense and calorie dilute (foods containing a lot of nutrients for a smaller number of calories). Basically that means decreasing high fat foods (those with lots of cheese, mayonnaise, and especially butter and any type of oils) and high carbohydrate foods (sweets, breads, pastas, mega-muffins, and yes, even rice and mac salad). Most festive foods contain plenty of fat and carbohydrate.

Drink plenty of water and fill up on foods with a high water and fiber content such as fruits and vegetables.

Small substitutes can make a big calorie difference. Eating only one-fourth of the mega-muffin will save you about 300 calories and temporarily make up for the 300 calories you didn't burn up in your usual three-mile walk.

For the holidays, replace whole

milk with 2 percent or 2 percent with 1 percent. Each percent decrease lowers the calories by 20 to 30 per cup. Try replacing the 12-ounce soda (38 grams sugar and 150 calories) with a vegetable juice cocktail containing lots of vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals but only 70 calories.

Snacks of fresh fruit or a can of vegetable juice cocktail can help reduce the appetite at meals. If ordering a plate lunch (which can have 1,000 to 2,500 calories), order the green salad in place of the mac salad, order one scoop of rice instead of two, and order the teri-beef or vegi-burger instead of the fried and breaded choices. Deleting a single scoop of rice (3/4 cup) could cut 200 calories. When ordering sandwiches, leave off the mayonnaise and oil to shave 100 to 200 calories and substitute a salad for the fries.

Can't find time for your regular exercise? Park farther from work or the store. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. And if you have a lot of copying to do, dance to the beat of the copier while humming a Christmas song. If caught, just say you are getting into the holiday spirit.

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