



Big weight gains can come in small, sweet packages

In the past few decades, the food-related holiday season seems to have started earlier and is lasting longer. In turn, extra holiday foods become extra pounds, and this weight gain leads to New Year's resolutions to lose weight and get healthy. But as the nation's waistlines are demonstrating, it is obvious these resolutions are not adequate for preventing long-term weight gain.

Question: From a nutritional standpoint, when does the food-related weight-gaining holiday season begin?

Answer: For most of us the holiday food challenge begins the day after Halloween with the challenge of dealing with those ubiquitous leftover treats. These little Halloween candies might seem harmless because they are generally small, but don't be fooled. These treats are "energy dense," meaning they contain a lot of calories for their size.

In fact, the miniature candies can make it easier to overeat. Research conducted at the University of Kentucky found that tiny food packages can be deceiving when it comes to calories consumed. In their study of package sizes and consumption behaviors, Maura Scott and colleagues showed that small candies in small packages did not reduce the caloric intake of individuals who were con-

sidered restrained eaters. In fact, restrained eaters tended to consume excess calories by nearly double when they were offered small foods in small packages compared with when they were offered small foods in large packages or large food portions in large packages.

Q: Who is considered a restrained eater?

A: Restrained eaters are individuals who chronically restrict their food intake to avoid gaining weight and becoming fat. Compared with natural eaters, restrained eaters tend to be overly rigid chronic dieters who set strict guidelines for themselves regarding good and bad foods. In addition, restrained eaters tend to have emotional responses to food, including temporarily overeating because of emotional situations or guilty feelings about eating forbidden foods. Also, it is not uncommon for restrained eaters to overeat or binge in response to overstepping their personal restricted food guidelines.

Q: What helps to maintain body weight throughout the holidays?

A: Understanding three key concepts can help to curb holiday weight gain.

1. A pound of fat is equal to about 3,500 calories.

2. When calories are consumed in excess of energy used, the end result is fat gain.

3. When enjoying extra holiday calories, find ways to expend more calories with physical activity and/or limit calories from other foods.

Eating just 60 calories a day more than usual during the two-month holiday season can add about one pound of body fat. When you realize that just two bite-size pieces of chocolate candy or one medium-size cookie can provide 80 calories, it is not hard to see how 3,500 extra calories can add up to an extra pound of body fat by the New Year.

Here are some tips to keep in calorie balance.

1. Share leftover Halloween candy with others.

2. Before going to a party, have a reasonable meal with adequate protein to curb the sweet-treat munchies.

3. Alcohol contains almost as many calories as fat, so limit alcohol consumption or offer to be the designated driver.

4. Buy yourself a pedometer and aim to walk at least an extra 2,000 steps for each 100-calorie treat consumed. Shopping steps do count, so park away from the store!

Joannie Dobbs, PhD, CNS and Alan Titchenal, PhD, CNS
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service.

© 2011 Honolulu Star-Bulletin -- <http://starbulletin.com>
<http://www.nutritionatc.hawaii.edu/Articles/2011/481.pdf>