

# Staying on Track with Exercise and Nutrition Through the Holidays

By Julie Kirst

Before Halloween even arrives, holiday decorations begin to appear in stores. Following close behind are the parties, desserts and shopping that can derail the strongest of fitness plans.

More than any other time of year, the holidays draw us into temptation, causing us to push our exercise and nutrition goals behind the plum pudding and shopping trips. It's been said that the average person gains 5 to 10 pounds during this time, yet according to a study by the National Institutes of Health, the actual weight gain from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day is a little over one pound. Unfortunately, the study also said that most people didn't lose that weight through the next year, contributing to overall weight gain through their life.

In the same study, the National Institutes of Health also reported that those who engaged in the most physical activity during this time gained less than others in the study.

Side-stepping the temptation to indulge in high-calorie party foods and finding time to exercise during the holidays helps maintain fitness goals, but this can be harder said than done. Below are some tips to see you through when your initial resolve begins to waver.

"Balance and thinking 'long-term' are important when it comes to getting in shape," says Sonki Hong, owner of Sonki Fitness in Santa Monica.

Hong, a five-time world fitness champion, says, "To lose weight you have to burn off more calories than you consume; there's no way around that."

He suggests thinking of this equation as a bank account. "Every time you exercise or eat healthy food it's like a deposit in your account. Every time you eat cookies or don't exercise it's like a withdrawal. Everything you do will have an effect on

your balance and it's up to you if you want to have a positive cash flow."

For example, think of a 10-minute walk as a \$5 deposit, which is better than nothing.

He adds that it doesn't have to be a complete workout and suggests incorporating exercise into necessary errands like shopping. "Take the stairs instead of the escalator, power walk instead of strolling, park farther from your destination and walk."

He also adds that when running a lot of errands or while shopping, many people eat badly and suggests carrying an energy bar or fruit and bottled water to stave off hunger.

For those who miss a workout or who overindulge, Hong says just get out there and make up for it. "Instead of feeling guilty, make something happen. The key is to actually go and do some exercise. After working out you'll feel so much better about yourself mentally and physically."

During the holidays when time is at a minimum, exercise is often the first task eliminated. For those who find this an easy temptation, Hong suggests teaming with a friend or using a trainer so you're more likely to stick with your exercise schedule.

Exercise is also a powerful way to minimize the depression associated with the holidays when people often feel isolated and alone. Exercise can provide a social outlet, reduce stress and improve self-esteem and energy.

On the food front, balance and thinking long-term are also ways to stick with nutrition goals, according to Susan Dopart, M.S., R.D., a nutrition and fitness consultant in Santa Monica.

Dopart, whose clients come to her for nutritional help with medical issues, says it's important for a person to take responsibility for their food choices and see how the foods they are eating affect their body. She suggests

asking questions such as: "How do I want to feel?" "Is this particular food helpful or hurtful to me?"

She says this strategy is helpful during the holidays when there's an abundance of food. "You're hit everywhere you go; with candy at the office and food at parties, it's a daily decision. Say to yourself, 'If I eat everything I see I won't be satisfied, so what few things do I really want to try? What can I sit down and savor and really enjoy?' If people sit and really enjoy their food, they'll be satisfied."

She adds that eating regular meals will prevent a person from feeling starved, making it easier to make positive food choices.

The stress of the holidays can cause many to turn to food to ease their anxiety. The default response is to go to the foods a person is used to eating and so the goal is to change the habitual response. "Catch yourself in those moments and try to do something different besides eating," she says.

For emotional eaters, Dopart also suggests focusing on the earned reward of their efforts instead of on the deprivation. "Instead of focusing on feeling deprived by saying no to some foods now, focus on the future, where over time you'll see your clothes fitting better and your body feeling better."

To stay on track during the holidays, Dopart says, "Eat regular meals, be sure to include protein, get exercise and sleep. Most of all try to keep reasonable expectations with respect to your food, exercise and your time."

As Hong says, "I don't like to see people unhappy with their bodies and not do anything about it. Empower yourself and take control of your life and your destiny."

For more information, contact Sonki Hong at [www.sonkifitness.com](http://www.sonkifitness.com) or Susan Dopart at [www.susandopart.com](http://www.susandopart.com). ■