

Conversation Corner

With Neal Spruce



A Newsletter for Fitness Enthusiasts

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Lean Tips for the Holiday Season

Holiday Health

Here we are again—the holiday season. A time when work often slows down and food consumption goes up. Let's see, that generally equates to many more calories in than calories out, yielding a net gain in the waistline that carries over to our New Year's resolutions when we decide to do something about the entire year's weight gain.

Guilt-free indulgence

Although I am no exception to the holiday phenomenon of consuming food and drink well beyond satisfying the basic needs of normal hunger and thirst, I also prepare myself by designing and partaking in a personal meal plan that, if I follow daily for eight weeks, I would lose four percent body fat (eight pounds of body fat in my case).

In other words, I follow my meal plan except on any holiday celebration day, including work and family gatherings, in which I eat and drink whatever I want with no guilt or weekly weight gain. The healthy days offset the overindulgence days. And by New Year's I am always the same body fat as last New Year's because I didn't just keep from gaining fat during the holidays but also removed any that might have been accrued throughout the year based on more days of eating right during the eight-week period than days of holiday binging.

Anyway, you get the point. What more could one ask for? At best you lose a few pounds while eating what you want when partying and you end up in a "health groove" starting the New Year. At worst (because you had a lot of parties) you had all the fun you wanted and gained no weight.

Alcohol

Too much alcohol not only can lead to "loosening the tongue" but it also reduces our control over

appetite. Adding insult to injury, each gram of alcohol yields seven calories and is metabolized as a fat. Therefore, every gram you consume is seven less calories of fat stores that will be burned for energy.

You see, our bodies have no storage depot for alcohol as we do for excess foods (fat stores) so the body must preferentially choose alcohol as its energy source in order to dispose of the chemical before it reaches toxic levels.

Now, of course, there is a level that is well before toxicity that many try to achieve in order to lighten the mood—and that's okay as long as you moderate it. The point is, alcohol not only contains a lot of calories but also can un-inhibit appetite leading to a gross over consumption of foods, which equals more calories.

Just be careful if you do drink. Have no more than what it may take to "relax the evening" and maybe allow you to say something witty or smile when you normally wouldn't.

Tips for moderation

That is always the key word—moderation—so write it down before heading to the holiday gatherings and do the best you can to remember that you will have a much greater overall holiday experience if you can moderate your activities. Let go, have fun, share yourself with others, but be in control of your actions so when the new year comes you can look back and say that was a great year and that you finished strong.

Now you will be ready for a better year!

I have included our 21 tips for helping survive holiday eating.

Happy holidays!

Neal

The Holidays are upon us with their abundance of stress and food. Here are 21 tips that will help get you successfully through the holidays without sacrificing your healthy lifestyle.

1. Exercise an hour a day, 4-5 days a week during the holidays. A brisk walk, run or bike-ride will burn calories, relieve stress, and elevate your endorphins and mood. If you have to miss a workout, simply increase your daily activities. Be sure not to snack during this time.
2. Avoid eating no fat. Eating moderate amounts of fat at a meal can help you feel full sooner and keep you full longer, just don't overdue it.
3. Don't skip meals. Skipping meals leads to hunger, low energy levels and improper food choices.
4. Don't pass up favorite foods or deprive yourself completely. Moderate consumption is the key.
5. Don't tempt yourself by keeping trigger foods or comfort foods around the house. If you have them, it increases the likelihood that you will overeat.
6. Plan meals by keeping in mind the demands you'll have on your schedule that day.
7. Don't go to a party starving. Before you leave home, eat something light or drink a meal replacement shake. Also, drink a great deal of water the day of the party.
8. When you attend holiday festivities, don't station yourself near the buffet table. Make a clear-cut decision to distance yourself from all goodies.
9. Alcoholic beverages pack on the calories so if you're drinking alcohol, stick to light beer or a champagne spritzer. Watch out for the eggnog, it is high in calories and fat.
10. If you do find yourself feeling depressed, soothe your spirit with a massage, manicure, pedicure, or facial. Men can enjoy this too!
11. When you shop, eat before you leave home so you won't resort to cookie breaks.
12. To satisfy your sweet tooth, set limits. For example, you might allow yourself two decadent desserts per week; just move more the next day.
13. Just because it is the holidays doesn't mean you should give yourself the license to eat everything that passes by. Factor in the little extras into your daily intake.
14. Help out by saving fat and calories when it's feasting time. Make or buy wild rice stuffing, baked sweet potatoes, whole-grain rolls and angel-food cake with fruit.
15. If you are staying with family or friends, ask them if you can have a space in the refrigerator and keep foods on hand to snack on like lean deli meats, cottage cheese, nonfat cheese sticks, etc.
16. If you tend to overeat during family gatherings, plan and visualize what and how much you will eat before you go. Plan additional daily activities for that day or the following one. The additional activity can be anything from a longer shopping day to additional gym time.
17. If you want to really keep yourself honest and the same size during the holiday season wear your most form-fitting blue jeans. Another trick is to tie a string or ribbon around your waist under your shirt that will not budge with the bulge.
18. If you are at the mercy of the dinner host, eat modest amounts of the foods offered and fill up on foods with more fiber and volume and fewer calories. Make a small plate and skip the seconds.
19. Eat whatever you want on the main holiday feast. If you over-do it just go back to your regular plan the next day and move a little more.
20. Take a meditative moment at least one time each day to breathe deeply and clear your mind of all the clutter.
21. Enjoy the season, not just the food!