

Conversation Corner

With Neal Spruce



apex

A Newsletter for Active People

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Holidays Unstressed

Keeping your fitness on track can make the holidays more enjoyable

For most of us this month's title sounds impossible, unless you're one of those lucky people whose better half takes care of all the extra holiday work and you simply get to go along for the ride – you know – dinners, parties, the fun stuff that requires so much preparation. The holidays are basically like adding a second job to your already sometimes stressful day. Then add in socializing with certain family members, which if given the choice you'd rather listen to nails on a chalk board, and you have the perfect formula for holiday stress.

Added stress often leads to a cascade of unfavorable conditions like impatience, emotional fragility, bickering, and weight gain due to food choices triggered more by mood swings or greater access rather than normal body-appetite functions. You have now entered the frustration/stress cycle: poor food selection followed by guilt and poor attitude, repeat poor food selection, guilt, poor attitude . . . and so on. But don't worry—you'll make a New Year's resolution and fix everything – *sure*.

Maintain good eating habits or tailor them so you can indulge guilt-free

No one is going to tell me I can't eat, drink and be merry during the festive season, and therefore I would never ask that of you. Instead, I give you tips on how to "cheat" the system so that you can actually lose weight—or at a minimum certainly not gain any, rendering the classic fitness-related New Year's resolution unnecessary—and get a great start to next year.

For those of you who missed the lesson you can find it in last year's holiday newsletter titled "[Eating in the Holiday Spirit: The Art of Cheating](#)". In a nutshell, you simply "save up calories" by eating your normal fare (or less) so you have plenty of room for extra calories on event days (parties, dinners, etc.). And make a rule around the workplace: do not bring in the traditional high calorie foods as holiday cheer. Instead, hold tasty, healthy luncheons rather than placing junk food all over the building. You're going to have lunch anyway and this way you get the festive atmosphere, creativity in menus and far fewer overall calories. And don't bother following the standard advice about putting out carrots or other vegetables instead of sweets, unless you work in a cabbage patch full of rabbits, because it doesn't work. Now you *can* put out the new Apex Peppermint Candy holiday cookies, but be sure to count them in your calories. They taste and look like sweets but are satiating and complete, and therefore can be a meal if you're saving up for a big night. Or simply cut them into pieces and put them on a plate as a junk food substitute. The great news for most of us is that we actually move more at this time of year (shopping, cleaning before guests arrive, shoveling snow), so let's take advantage of the extra movement!

Burn it, prove it then eat it!

For bodybugg™ users this is a great time to play games using your tool. You're fortunate in that you get a very clear picture of exactly how many

calories you burn from extra holiday activities such as shopping, event preparation and participation. When you get real-time feedback you have full control of your daily weight outcomes, so you know exactly how much you can eat before anything bad happens. You also know exactly what to do in order to make up for overindulging. The more you move the more you get to eat and you can see the number all day, every day. For example: 2 more hours standing and doing light-type activities (standing, pacing, shopping, cleaning, partying, etc.) you will have burned at least an extra 250-500 calories depending on your size and type of movement.

Now if you start this on November 1st, and do this through New Year's, 5-days a week, you will have burned an extra 2000 calories a week (using normal daily activities only) and 18,000 calories – or more than 5LBS of fat – for the 2 month period! Consider the average person gains 2-3LBS through the holidays and you may end up actually weighing less by the time you get to New Year's, eliminating the need for the obligatory resolution that no one can stick to. AND throughout the holidays you get to truly enjoy your eating experiences (i.e. no guilt) because you were able to prove you earned it at each venue by having visibility to the fact that you had all those calories to spare as you entered the eating zones. Trust me, there's nothing like downloading your bodybugg™ and seeing you've burned 1000 calories more than you've eaten and now you are "free to PARTY!" And don't forget, you will be burning a lot more calories attending events than if you were at home watching TV.

In summary, take advantage of being busy because when things are hectic and you "run" from one place to another preparing for, attending, or holding events, shopping, etc., you will be burning many more calories, which can also reduce eating opportunities – at least during the times you are actively busy.

Keeping your stress level down

Don't miss workouts

If there is one activity you currently employ that you do not want to compromise during the holidays, it's exercise. Not only because of the extra calories you burn but more because of its ability to keep you sane if this time of year takes a toll on you personally.

Exercise delivers "the triple benefit" during the holidays: obviously it helps burn added calories you're probably consuming, but the two less obvious rewards are exercise's ability to naturally de-stress and keep you guilt-free – just because you did it. I am a huge proponent of taking time off from working out, but not during most of the holiday season – this is a time when you really need it! I am not sure there is a better way to keep stress at bay than exercising. Additionally, exercise has been proven to be a better strategy for treating depression than any drug on the market. The hormonal changes, including the release of endorphins that take place during and following exercise, naturally soothe the entire

body. And if you're not exercising, this may be the best time to start – before the holidays, not after the New Year.

Meditate

For those who know a *little* about me, I know what you're thinking: *there is no way Neal meditates*. First of all, I suppose there is some sort of proper method to the actual discipline of meditation – and you're right – I don't know it. I simply believe that everyone can find a personal form of relaxation that can help in maintaining sanity, productivity and happiness. So my form of "meditation" involves the darkness and stillness of the early morning. It is a time when the world is sleeping, the pressure of daily life has not yet awakened, and my head is clear, thoughtful and pure. My start time is 4:00 am each morning (in fact it's 4:45 AM right now) because I also feel I get "one-up" on the rest of the world. While the universe around me is dormant, I have the opportunity to run all important issues, past, present and future, uninterrupted through a "clean" or untainted thought process.

Whether you know it or not, the brain reorganizes while you sleep – in a sense it "closes all the drawers" you left open during the day and reshuffles their contents, giving you the chance for a fresh start upon rising. Personally, I can't have commotion while I begin the day; otherwise that "window" of clear thinking may close and potentially negatively affect analytic prowess, decisions or simply render me less productive.

Besides mostly working on Apex/bodybugg™ intellectual property at this time, I will often sit with a cup of coffee and stare out my window into the dark, noiseless world while my brain takes inventory. This frequently involves pulling forward childhood memories, merging them into a vision for the future and exorcising unnecessary thoughts that would otherwise become roadblocks to clear thinking. Finally, this allows me to settle into a daily focus that will accomplish something very important, thus making a positive contribution toward the "big picture," which in my case is generally "saving the world" through fitness.

Obviously, I am not telling anyone to get up and start their day a 4AM because most people would fall back to sleep. Instead, I am suggesting that, especially during the holidays, you find a convenient or favorite time of the day to be calm, when you can build inner-strength by organizing your thoughts that can be put into action. By the time you go to bed at night you end up saying "What a great day!" rather than "What a miserable, crazy day." Either way you will probably start the next day where you left off.

A strong body can strengthen the mind & brighten the holidays

It is amazing how fitness can change one's attitude – exercise can help you recharge and eating properly positively affects the way you look and feel. Any way you slice it, fitness creates a happier, more satisfied, delightful person. Once you have experienced the euphoric feeling of true fitness (and successfully mastering the art of cheating!), it's locked in your mind and will continue to emanate throughout your body. You won't want to let that feeling slip away because any alternative will only be disappointing.

Don't ignore your body during this festive time of year. Everyone, especially those who plan the celebrations and do all the work, should enjoy each day of the holiday season, and fitness will only intensify your happiness. The holidays are a unique time for family, friends, reflection, vision, giving, and most of all caring for all humanity – caring, sharing & giving together.

Merry Fitness!

-Neal

12 typical, boring tips that may also help get you 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.
2. Don't skip meals. Eat small snacks if you are saving up calories. Skipping meals leads to hunger, low energy levels and improper food choices (which you might have to make anyway!).
3. Don't pass up favorite foods or deprive yourself completely. Moderate consumption is the key—unless you saved up the calories.
4. Don't go to a party starving (unless you want to). 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.
5. Alcoholic beverages pack on the calories so if you're drinking alcohol, use diet sodas & tonic water for mixers. Watch out for the eggnog--it's high in calories and fat.
6. If you do find yourself feeling depressed, soothe your spirit with a walk, massage, or facial. Men enjoy this too!
7. To satisfy your sweet tooth, set limits. For example, you might allow yourself two decadent desserts per week; just move more the next day.
8. 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.
9. If you are at the mercy of your 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 seconds.
10. 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.
11. Take a meditative moment at least one time each day to breathe deeply and clear your mind of all the clutter.
12. Enjoy the season, not just the food!