

## Holiday Weight Gain Contributes to Lifetime Obesity

While researching this story, I stumbled across a quiz titled "*Will You Gain Weight Over the Holidays?*" The first question was humorous and intriguing - "What's your holiday party buffet strategy? A) Try a little of everything; B) Check out all of your choices and then pick the healthiest foods; or C) Be first in line." You can take the quiz yourself at [quiz.ivillage.com/cgi-bin/diet/tests/GainWeightHolidays.pl](http://quiz.ivillage.com/cgi-bin/diet/tests/GainWeightHolidays.pl) to find out whether you and your scale will be friends or enemies come January.

There is a popular belief that most people gain from five to ten pounds between Thanksgiving and New Year's. However, a 2000 study done by researchers at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) showed a weight gain of about one pound during the winter season, but that this extra weight accumulates through the years and may be a major contributor to obesity later in life.

They researchers looked at 195 volunteers, ages 19-82 years, weighing from 95 to 306 pounds. About half were male, half female. Their weight was measured at six-week intervals before, during, and after the holiday season and in June and September, one year after the study began.

Most of the weight gain that occurred happened between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. When researchers looked at why, two factors stood out: level of hunger and level of activity. Those who reported being less active or more hungry had the greatest holiday weight gain. And, unfortunately for those already struggling, overweight and obese volunteers were more likely to gain five pounds than those who were not already overweight.

According to the study's Dr. Yanovski "This is a 'good news/bad news' story. The good news is that people don't gain as much weight as we thought during the holidays. The bad news is that weight gained over the winter holidays isn't lost during the rest of the year." When 165 of the volunteers were weighed a year after the study began, they had not lost the extra weight gained during the holidays, and ended the year 1.4 pounds heavier than the year before. Over the course of five years, the "holiday season" could be responsible for a 7.5 pound weight gain. To put this into perspective, a forty-year old female could jump from 170 pounds to 185 pounds by the time she's fifty – just from holiday eating and decreased activity!

Considering how hard it is to lose weight, the obvious (but not always simple) answer is to not gain it in the first place. Two tips to get you started for controlling the pounds this season:

- Stay active. As shown by the study, being less active was a major contributor to weight gain. Don't skip your exercise. When you're busy and stressed, you need to move your body even more. If you need motivation, you can contact our office for classes such as yoga, strength training, or beginning step and aerobics. Why wait until January?!
- Don't starve yourself. A common mistake is to go hungry all day so you can "afford" the calories later on at a holiday party. What usually happens is that you go overboard and eat more calories at the party than you would have all day. Plus, blood sugar levels will likely plummet throughout the day, causing more cravings. Many of our clients have insulin resistance and/or Type 2 diabetes, and knowing how to balance their meals helps with weight issues as well as energy levels.

- Manage stress. Schedule some down-time for yourself. Take a yoga class, get a massage, read a book, or just sit quietly. All of these activities can increase the serotonin levels in your brain, helping you to feel calmer. When you're calm, you're less likely to overeat.

Next in the series – Making Smart Food Choices During the Holiday Season

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