



Wellness Advocate

The Holidays Are Here: Guard Your Waistline!



From October through January, the number of parties, family dinners and office gatherings — complete with delicious but fattening foods — grows right along with our waistlines. Food is a central part of holiday celebrations, and it's easy to just "let go" and wait until the new year to start healthier habits. So before the holidays get into high gear, here's some food for thought:

"Many of us will gain anywhere from seven to 10 pounds from the middle of October through the end of the year because of all the fatty foods available at parties and other gatherings," said Stefanie Barthmire, a psychotherapist with the Methodist Weight Management Center in Houston. "If you're not careful those numbers could easily double very quickly," she added.

For many people, food is a distraction from what is really troubling them, she noted. "We are using food for coping and comfort — and of course, we know eating is not the answer. All the food does is cause the number on the scale to creep up, causing a whole host of problems with health and self-esteem."

"If it was just a matter of knowing the calorie difference between a piece of cake and broccoli, we would all be our ideal weight. Maintaining a healthy weight requires a disciplined approach mentally and physically. Finding a way to refrain from using food to help you feel better is the key. Unfortunately, it's complicated and there is not a one-size-fits-all solution."

This doesn't mean you can't enjoy your favorite foods. A little portion control can go a long way. Try these tips to help you through the holiday season without the gift of weight gain:

- Fill at least half of your plate with vegetables. This will leave less room for the higher-calorie items and will add bulk to your meal, helping you fill up more quickly. Choose a lot of vegetables that are not heavily seasoned with butter and/or sugar.

- Use familiar items to measure your portion sizes. A deck of cards, for example, is about the same size as a 3-ounce piece of meat. A tennis ball is about the same size as a sensible serving of mashed potatoes.

- Reduce the amount of gravies and sauces on your plate. These can be a source of hidden calories and fat in your meal.

- If you have a choice, select a smaller plate or a taller and thinner glass than the others on the buffet table. This will give you the illusion of a fuller plate or an equivalent drink.

- Start with a small serving; you can have more later if you are still hungry.

- Pace yourself through the meal. Eat slowly and participate in the conversation to give yourself a chance to enjoy the meal and feel full.

- Pay attention to your body's cues. Eat slowly. Enjoy conversation. Breathe. When you begin to feel full, it is time to stop!

Quick Takes: Stay Active During the Thanksgiving Weekend!

1. Run a turkey trot

Sign up for a local turkey trot fun run — most have kids' divisions so you can make it a family affair. Active.com has a good search engine to help you find a race near you.

2. Play flag football

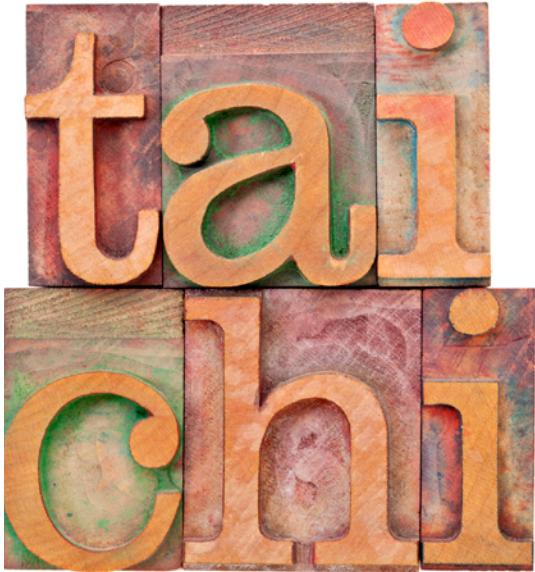
This backyard game is a Turkey Day classic. Or, try football team tag: to avoid getting tagged out, call out the name of an NFL team before "it" touches you (college teams would work too).

3. Take a walk or hike

Stroll the neighborhood or explore a local park or trail — this activity promotes companionship and family bonding as well as fitness. Try walking games to keep antsy kids on track.



A Gentle Way to Fight Stress:



Tips

- 1. Be patient.** People often feel frustrated when they can't remember the sequence of movements. Practice and repetition will fix those things.
- 2. Stay focused.** "Tai chi works with the mind and the body," explains Edward Ware, a tai chi instructor at Crunch Fitness in New York. "Over time, you can more fully comprehend these connections if you practice in a way that promotes this awareness." The bottom line: banish outside thoughts when you practice tai chi — focus on you.
- 3. Enjoy it!** "Tai chi is about process, not result," says Ware. "There's no need to rush to the end of the movement or feel like you have to keep with other students. Tai chi is an investment that grows over time, and pays dividends in all areas of your life."

Recipe: Home-Style Green Bean Casserole

This holiday essential gets a much-needed makeover from fresh veggies and a lightened (but super-rich!) homemade sauce. And the best part: It's under 200 calories!

Ingredients

1 1/2 pounds fresh green beans, trimmed
2 tablespoons butter
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups 2% reduced-fat milk
1/2 cup nonfat buttermilk
1 tablespoon ranch dressing mix
2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon butter
1 (8-oz.) package sliced fresh mushrooms
Vegetable cooking spray
1 cup French fried onions, crushed
1/2 cup panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)
2 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped

Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Cook green beans in boiling salted water to cover in a Dutch oven 4 to 6 minutes or to desired degree of doneness; drain. Plunge into ice water to stop the cooking process; drain and pat dry.
2. Melt 2 Tbsp. butter in Dutch oven over medium heat; whisk in flour until smooth. Cook, whisking constantly, 1 minute. Gradually whisk in 1 1/2 cups milk; cook, whisking constantly, 3 to 4 minutes or until sauce is thickened and bubbly. Remove from heat, and whisk in buttermilk, ranch, thyme, salt and pepper.
3. Melt 1 tsp. butter in a medium skillet over medium-high heat; add mushrooms, and sauté 6 to 8 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove from heat; let stand 5 minutes. Gently toss mushrooms and green beans in buttermilk sauce. Place in a 13- x 9-inch or 3-qt. baking dish coated with cooking spray.
4. Combine French fried onions, panko and tomatoes; sprinkle over green bean mixture.
5. Bake at 350° for 25 to 30 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly. Serve immediately.

Nutritional Information per serving (makes eight servings)

Calories: 168 | Fat: 8.4g | Saturated fat: 3.9g | Protein: 5.7g | Carbohydrates: 18.5g
Fiber: 3.9g | Cholesterol: 15mg | Iron: 0.9mg | Sodium: 296mg | Calcium: 104mg

Tai chi is an ancient Chinese exercise regimen that combines movement, breathing and meditation. To an observer, a tai chi practitioner looks as if he or she is moving in slow motion. Learning tai chi and practicing it a few times a week can improve balance, improve muscular strength and reduce stress.

For this particular activity, plan on taking a class; a live instructor can observe what you're doing and guide you to develop the proper techniques. If you don't have that option, instructional books or videos will help you learn tai chi. To find a local tai chi class, look in the Yellow Pages under "Martial Arts Instruction"; inquire at local health clubs, YM/YWCAs and colleges; or search the Internet for a geographical list of schools and instructors. Classes may be held almost anywhere: in a park, a studio or someone's home. Find a location where you feel comfortable; typical classes will last 60 – 90 minutes.

Perseverance is the key to mastering tai chi. Try to practice at the same time every day. The movements may feel awkward at first, and you may feel some soreness afterward. The exercises typically begin to feel smooth and natural after a few weeks of practice.

Anyone with a heart condition, osteoporosis, arthritis or other serious ailment or infirmity should consult a doctor before starting a tai chi course. But tai chi's slow, fluid, low-impact movements often make it an ideal form of exercise for seniors and recovering heart attack patients.