

Surviving the holidays, nutritionally speaking  
By Cpt. Allison Sweet  
Special to Guidon

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. (Dec. 13, 2012) – If you fear weight gain this holiday season, surviving your holiday spread may be easier than you think.

In fact, if it's your goal, you can even lose weight with a few simple steps!

#### Be a Mindful Eater

Research has shown that when people know how many calories are in their food, they make healthier food choices and/or reduce their portion sizes. Before you leave for your next holiday party, figure out which holiday foods have the most amount of calories, sugar, and/or fat.

There are many free online programs as well as free smart phone apps that can provide nutrition information on thousands of different foods. Many of these programs can also keep track of your daily calorie intake.

Selecting a healthier alternative can make a lot of difference in terms of your waistline. For example, choosing pumpkin pie with whipped cream instead of pecan pie can save you almost 200 calories per 1/8 slice of pie.

#### Reduce the Grazing

When people constantly nibble on appetizers and other munchies, they can consume a lot of calories without ever feeling full. When your stomach is full, it sends a signal to the brain to encourage you to stop eating.

Instead of grazing, focus on eating either 3 meals or 5-6 smaller-sized meals per day. If plan to snack on munchies before a main meal, pre-portion all of the healthy snacks onto one small plate.

Once you finish the plate, you know to stop reaching for snacks and that you did not overindulge.

#### Trust Your Stomach, Not Your Eyes

Remember the expression, "your eyes are bigger than your stomach?"

Holiday get-togethers are usually centered around mouth-watering goodies. It's okay to try those yummy treats, but control how much you eat. You may find that choosing smaller portions is often enough to fully enjoy the taste without overindulging and feeling stuffed.

#### Be Aware of Liquids with Calories

According to the IDEA's Health and Fitness Association, Americans consume 21% of their daily calories in the form of beverages. Liquid calories do not fill a person up at the same rate solid foods do.

People can drink a lot of fluids (and calories) without feeling full. For example, a 20 oz bottle of fruit juice has about the same calories as five whole fruits (ie. apples or oranges); and most people cannot eat 5 fruits without feeling full.

Alcohol can be another weight loss saboteur. Alcohol provides calories based on the concentration (or proof) of alcohol in a beverage. The stronger the proof, the greater the amount of calories. Alcohol also impairs your ability to recognize when you're full and you may eat more food than what your body needs.

### Stay Active

It's very easy to get caught-up in the hustle and bustle of the season. Physical activity is a must if you are going to increase your daily calorie intake. Your body will turn extra or unused calories into body fat without exercise.

If you know that you will not be able to be physically active, adjust your food and beverage intake accordingly.

### Warm Up for the Main Event

If you know that you do not have enough willpower to control your portions at your next holiday gathering, have a small meal or large-sized snack about an hour before you go to a party.

You are more likely to make smart food choices (to include portion sizes) when your stomach is not on empty. When you are hungry, you are most likely to grab large-sized portions of food that are often higher in calories.

### Have a Back-Up Plan

Activating your resources is another great tip to help you to prevent over indulging. If the dessert table becomes too tempting, start up a game of football or video game challenge.

Ask a trusted friend or family member to help encourage you to make smart food choices or distract you from reaching for a second or third helping.

The average American adult will gain about one pound of fat this holiday season, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

So, have a game plan that's simple and easy to follow. Enjoy spreading some holiday cheer, while you avoid the spread around your waistline, without avoiding the holiday spread on the buffet table!

The General Leonard Wood Army Community Hospital Nutrition Care Division is actively engaged with its patients and committed to providing well-coordinated care that promotes and optimizes health.

For more information, contact the General Leonard Wood Army Community Hospital Nutrition Care Division at 573.596.0131, ext. 69659.

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