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Preventing Holiday Weight Gain

The desire for eating has many levels to it. True hunger (stimulated by hunger pains in the stomach), is actually a rarity for most Americans, since we now know that two-thirds of all adults are overweight. A second stimulus for eating is simply being around others who are consuming food – especially sweets and snack foods. And third, sometimes we are moved to eat extra sweets and other “empty carbohydrates” because we seek comforting.

These last two reasons, being around others who are enjoying food and seeking comfort food, are the two main villains of causing extra holiday pounds. Now being around others who are enjoying food is an easy situation to understand. Merely looking at others enjoying themselves provides a natural temptation to join them.

However, comfort eating is a more complex issue, since this one involves seeking emotional soothing through sweets and high-glycemic carbohydrates (ones that immediately raise your blood sugar significantly). When surveyed, 41% of women admitted that they eat for comfort during the winter holidays. Why is this?

First, the darkness of winter results in a large decrease in sunlight. (See *Physiological Causes for Winter Blues: Seasonal Affectation Disorder*.) Second, because the holiday season brings up a lot of anxiety-producing memories from our childhood. And third, from the most ancient times, people were always afraid of the darkness and gloom, and this triggers our instinctive, subconscious fears.

To help us alleviate the anxieties and fears and feel better, we seek comfort foods; in the form of carbohydrate foods (not just deserts, sweets and junk foods, but also sweet yams, baked potatoes smothered in gravy, chicken or turkey stuffing, etc.) because *they raise one's blood serotonin levels, giving us an emotional boost!*

So this holiday season, instead of trying to fight back your emotions, here are some practical guidelines to prevent binging:

- Don't go to a gathering when you're starving hungry, have a little snack ahead so you don't spin out of control.
- At gatherings, get involved in conversations and visiting with others to refocus your mind away from a taste-bud rampage.
- Avoid drinking alcohol, as this releases your inhibitions and destroys self-control.
- When you eat, remember to chew each bite at least 10 times. This triggers more enzyme secretion and makes you feel satisfied quicker.
- Get enough sleep. Sleep deprivation is proven to stimulate increased appetite.
- If you must have desert, make it just one – not a taste of all of them. (Trust us, you won't be able to resist having some more.)
- Portion control is the most important part of weight control. Don't deny yourself something you love; it'll only set you up for binging later. Limiting the size of portions is the key. Remember when you're hungry and loading up your plate, “your eyes are bigger than your stomach.”
- Walk everyday, it will burn off the calories and alleviate that stuffed, lethargic feeling.