

**Q.** How can I keep from gaining weight over the holidays (and don't tell me to not eat pie, because I know I will)?

**A.** It's commonly thought that most people gain 5-10 pounds between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. Not so, according to the National Institutes of Health. Fewer than 10% will gain that amount. Americans, on average, gain about a pound during the 6 weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

A pound doesn't sound like much. But if this extra weight accumulates over the years, it could contribute to obesity later in life. How can you enjoy the holidays without putting on unwanted pounds? Researchers from the National Task Force on the Treatment and Prevention of Obesity found that only two factors influence weight gain: level of hunger and level of activity. Here are the best ways to maintain your present weight.

**Be more active.** The best weight-gain stopper is physical activity. Experts recommend 30-60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. It doesn't have to be continuous movement. You can achieve 30 minutes of



exercise by spending 15 minutes power-cleaning your house in the morning, and 15 minutes walking around the block in the afternoon. Increasing your physical activity – not just during the holidays, but all year long – is an effective way to prevent weight gain. Make activity a fun part of your holiday time together. Take the family with you and go walking, skiing, ice skating, and “power shopping.”

**Increase your steps.** One study found that you could keep weight-gain at bay by walking 10,000 steps each day throughout the holiday season. You can buy a pedometer to help you keep track. A few trips upstairs to straighten the kids' rooms, walking from the car to the office, walking through the grocery store, and a quick trip to the post office will all add up. You'll be surprised at how far you go each day!

**Power shop.** Think of shopping and those laps through the mall as a form of exercise. Spend 30 minutes briskly walking from one end of the mall to the other as you shop for holiday gifts. Park your car in the farthest spot from the store. Browse through a catalog while on a treadmill.

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**Start a tradition of non-food-oriented celebrations.** Take a walking tour of your neighborhood to view holiday lights. Host a holiday dance party and serve mineral water and fat-free or low-fat snacks. Go caroling. Host a Christmas-card-signing party and serve hot cinnamon-spiced tea.

**Convert traditional recipes to healthier versions.** You can usually bake cookies with one-third less sugar and fat than called for in the recipe. Fruit pies make a delicious dessert and can be made with less added sugar. A cobbler has fewer calories and more fruit or berries. Switch to cooking and baking with unsaturated fats, such as olive and canola oils. Consider serving fruit, such as fruit salad or a tropical fruit plate in place of dessert.

**Eat your favorite foods in moderation.** Denying yourself everything you love might cause you to binge out of control at some point. Instead, plan to eat a small portion of your traditional must-have holiday foods and stay away from other high-fat, less healthy foods that don't have emotional meaning for you.

**Keep portion sizes small and watch seconds!** Take one plate of food. If you're at a party with a buffet table, move as far away from the table as possible to minimize the temptation to nibble. Eat slowly to give your body a chance to realize when it's full. If you host a party, send leftovers home with guests. If you end up eating more than you should, walk an extra 30 minutes that day.

**Dress in a snug-fitting outfit to remind yourself to not overindulge.** If all the clothes in your closet seem frumpy or out-of-date, take yourself shopping before a party. Make sure you feel attractive so you don't eat because you feel bad about how you look.

**Eliminate alcohol – or limit yourself to one drink per day.** Alcohol doesn't satisfy your appetite and will probably weaken your willpower. Instead, drink water with a twist of lemon.

**Serve fancy soups, salads, and fruit dishes.** These low-calorie choices will offset higher calorie holiday foods. They're also festive and can help your holiday meals be special.

**In order to maintain a healthy weight and prevent chronic disease, watch what you eat and how much you eat, and stay physically active. It is the rare person who exercises regularly and eats right who is also overweight.**

