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'We wish you a merry waistline ...'

Healthy habits can help hold off holiday heaviness

NEWS RELEASE

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Overeating seems as much a holiday tradition as the merry greetings we exchange this time of year. The season of glad tidings brings grand meals, grandma's pies, cookies, candies, cakes and cocktails. Weight gain can seem unavoidable.

However, according to Denette Kirschner, a nutritionist at the Northern Menominee Health Center in Spalding, there are a plethora of simple strategies that can help people prevent post-holiday portliness.

For starters, exercise.

"Many people feel stressed out this time of year and stress wreaks havoc on our metabolisms," said Kirschner. "When we're stressed the body stores fat and this causes weight gain. The best way to lower stress is to keep your exercise plan in place. It enhances endorphins which help ward off stress and combat the extra calories you'll consume."

She recommends at least 30 minutes of exercise a day.

"Schedule your exercise in your appointment calendar and you'll tend to stick with it," she said.

Kirschner said lightening up holiday dishes will also make a difference.



There are many temptations to indulge in during the holiday season. Making wise nutrition choices, practicing moderation and sticking with your regular exercise routine are keys to staying in shape while enjoying the holiday festivities. (Stock photo)

“For example, instead of butter in your mashed potatoes, use chicken broth. Rather than using sugar in your baking, try an artificial sweetener like Splenda,” she said.

Avoiding the fatty and cholesterol-filled turkey skin, and eating off of smaller plates to lessen serving sizes are other tips she recommends.

Holiday parties can be major sources of high calorie consumption. The festivities often begin with cocktails.

“Alcohol has a lot of calories. It’s easy for people to consume 2000 calories through cocktails before the meal even begins,” Kirschner said. “Beer is usually lower in calories than mixed drinks. Wine is a better option if you’re only going to have one glass. Red wine has less than 100 calories and it has more antioxidants, which promote heart health,” she said.

After drinks comes the inevitable foray of fabulous foods: merry meats, tantalizing treats, and other delicious indulgences. Kirschner advises partygoers to plan ahead in order to counter the cornucopia of Christmastime cuisine.

“Don’t go to a holiday party hungry. Eat something healthy before you attend; that will lessen the temptations. Also, bring a dish that’s healthy, a vegetable tray for example. That will at least give you one healthy option at the party,” she said.

In order to avoid feeling like a grinch at the party, partake in some of the festive food fare, but in modest portions, Kirschner said.

“Another thing you can do is to be a social butterfly. The more you socialize with other guests at the party the less time you’ll have to consume calories,” she added.

Kirschner recommends the web site *www.choosemyplate.gov* for more information on healthy nutrition habits throughout the year.

The warmth and good cheer of the holidays can elevate one’s spirit. Kirschner said that with a few slight adjustments, the holidays need not elevate one’s weight as well.

(The Northern Menominee Health Center is a part of a federally qualified health center called the U.P. Association of Rural Health Services, Inc. The association owns and operates several health facilities in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan: Dickinson-Iron Dental Center, Crystal Falls; Ewen Medical-Dental Center, Ewen; Marquette-Alger Community Health Center, Marquette; Northern Menominee Health Center, Spalding; Northern Menominee Health Center South, Menominee; Sawyer Dental Center, Gwinn (Sawyer); and West Mackinac Dental Clinic, Engadine. For more information about the U.P. Association of Rural Health Services, Inc., visit <http://www.upruralhealth.org>)

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