

The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

It happens every year around this time. The air gets colder, the days get shorter and your jeans get a little tighter... It's that time of year where lights, smells and sounds are in full holiday effect. Ready or not, feasting season is upon us. That seemingly endless time of temptation that starts with Thanksgiving stuffing and pies, continues through to Halloween candy, onto Christmas treats, and finally comes the New Year's toasts. Oh, and then we have Valentine's Day chocolates to contend with. We have four months of constant feasting. Avoiding weight gain may sound as believable as Santa fitting down billions of chimneys in one night. If we do feast throughout the season as many people do, without control, then we set ourselves up for a new year of bad patterns, ill health and weight gain. And as we all know too well; excess pounds don't disappear with the decorations. The average weight gain during the holiday season is actually closer to one pound than the five - seven pounds that many believe it is. Good news, right? Don't whip out your noise makers in excitement just yet. The downside is that people don't usually lose that one pound once they've gained it. The average weight gain per year is two pounds which breaks down to approximately 20 pounds in a decade! Hopefully some of these tips can help us all get through the holiday season without those seemingly inevitable extra pounds.

First things first, do **NOT** try to lose weight over the holiday season. It's just not realistic. Trying to lose weight during this time can only add unnecessary stress and set you up for failure. Don't try any pre-holiday crash diets so you can make it all up during the holidays either. Chances are you will wake up in January weighing even more than you do before the crash diet. Set out to maintain your pre-holiday weight through the New Year, so you can enjoy the festivities without deprivation and guilt.

The holidays are a time of celebration with family, friends and co-workers. Focus more on relationships and less on food, keeping it secondary to the good time you are enjoying. The holiday mentality encouraged by the media advertisements is that you should be feasting at every gathering. Wrong. That only leads to overeating, weight gain, and New Year's resolutions that just never seem to be kept. For real this time, be in the moment. Engage, laugh. Really listen to your guest's story about their recent

vacation. Ask your grandma about family traditions and how they came to be. Make eye contact, connect and engage with every person who is special to you in the room and make sure that you leave the event full of love, rather than fruit cake.

Beware of the festive fifteen! Be conscious of what you eat and how much. Treat yourself, but in moderation. When you arrive at a holiday event, especially a buffet, take a good look around without a plate in hand. Choose the main things that you want to try. You don't have to try them all. Once you have decided, get a plate and stick to your decision! This will help to avoid the "what the hell" effect. This common phenomenon occurs when you slip up on your diet and instead of getting back on track you throw in the towel. If you stumble? Do say "what the hell" then make your next bite a healthy one.

We are glass full kind of people, we hope for the best, right? But prepare for the worst. Expect the unexpected. Always carry an emergency bag of healthy food that requires no refrigeration and is easily accessible. A bag of nuts, granola, dried fruit or dried cereal will always come in handy when you are stuck in the holiday hustle & bustle with visions of sugar plums dancing in your head... Stay strong!

All of those holiday toasts can add up by the time the New Year's Eve ball drops. **Drink up wisely.** If you normally consume seven drinks per week (moderate consumption for a woman) and then innocently turn that into 11 drinks for the holiday season, the extra 16 drinks (four drinks per four weeks of the holidays) equals about 1,600 calories. Not so innocent anymore. The calories may not sound so bad, but they contribute to that one-pound weight gain we are trying to avoid. Enjoy a few figure friendly twists on your classic cocktails during the holiday season and the word diet won't ever reach your New Year's resolution list when January rolls around. Eggnog is packed full of calories. This holiday drink is better left at the bar! Unless of course you make some serious changes. First skip the heavy cream and choose skim milk and fat free half and half instead. Egg substitute are just as good as the real deal with fewer calories. Now since you

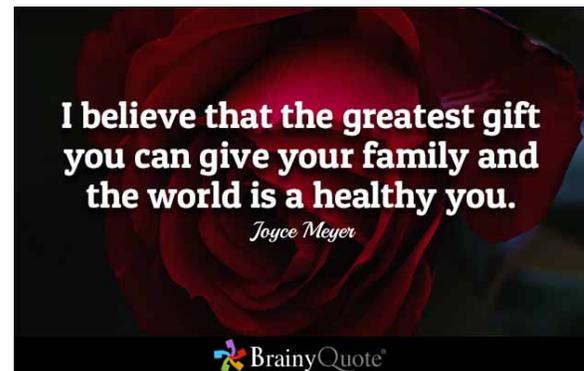
have just cut you caloric intake down about 60 calories, feel free to add ¼ cup of brandy or rum for a little kick, or spice it up with a little nutmeg. There are also a large variety of light juices available. For example choose light cranberry juice the next time you choose to toast with a cape cod. Adding lots of ice not only keeps your cocktail cold and refreshing but it also cuts down on calories. Wine spritzer's are a perfect way to make merry without packing on the pounds. Start with just a splash of wine add a shot of healthy light pomegranate or cranberry juice, both of which are nutrient heavy and calorie light. Finally throw in a touch of soda or sparkling water. Cheers!



Making a list, checking it twice, the shopping and crowds and the wrapping and entertaining. We understand how easy it is to feel not so wonderful at the most wonderful time of the year. Every year as the holiday season approaches, I commit myself to really enjoying the season. I refuse to be sucked into Christmas chaos, which can cause so much stress on our minds and bodies, and I am determined to fully enjoy the season I've loved with all my heart since I was a little girl. One great way to deal with holiday emotions and stress is to make sure exercise remains a priority. Exercise is always a great stress reliever. Another way to keep stress to a minimum is to learn to say "no" in a courteous manner of course. You're not being a Grinch by skipping a party when you feel worn-down, you're being smart. Think of it as preventive medicine. Reducing stress is another way to avoid getting ill. If you truly can't attend the holiday party, well then, you simply can't attend. We

are hardwired to follow others at mealtime, if you really do not want a second helping or another cookie, politely decline. People will hopefully respect your decisions and may even emulate them. At social events, try not to fill awkward silence with food. Many people will choose to eat and drink because they are feeling stressed, nervous or unsure of what to say in certain social situations. Instead try to try to get to know people, beyond superficial small talk. You never know what friendships, romances, and business relationships you may create.

Finally try to maintain a healthy lifestyle both inside and outside of the fall/winter feasting seasons. Constant weight gains and losses can be harmful to your health and your psyche. Remember the real reason for the season, isn't to eat drink and be merry... Well maybe the merry part. Step away from the table and enjoy the important things the season has to offer. Faith, family, friendship, love and traditions.



Here's to a season filled with warmth, comfort and good cheer! I wish you all the love and happiness this season can bring, and may it follow you throughout the coming new year.

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