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Holiday Pounds

Five pounds! This is the amount of weight that people commonly believe is gained during the holiday season --- Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. There is good news and bad news about holiday weight gain.

The good news is that people tend to overestimate how much weight is gained during the holidays. The best and most recent research on the topic indicates that average holiday weight gain for Americans is only about one pound. But before you interpret this as a license to reach for more holiday treats, be aware of the bad news. Most adults do not lose the weight they gain during the holidays. Furthermore, the weight gained during the holidays accounts for about half of the weight adults tend to gain year after year.

How can a person get through the holidays without gaining any weight? Here are several effective strategies:

- Keep moving. Build extra walking or other physical activity into holiday routines. Physical activity helps with stress management as well as burning calories.
- Be a picky eater. Budget calories for the special foods that you really love, and avoid mindlessly eating routine foods (especially snack foods).
- Avoid being hungry when you go to parties. Eat healthy snacks before the party... this helps one avoid binges.
- Be cautious with alcohol intake. Not only does alcohol pack a lot of calories, it weakens one's ability to avoid overeating.

- Be slow... slow to get in the food line and slow to eat your food.
- Get adequate sleep. People tend to be better able to manage their food intake when rested.
- Keep a diary of what you eat... that is, everything you eat. Consistent self-monitoring is one of the most effective weight management methods, especially when there is a specific target for daily caloric or fat intake.
- Maintain perspective. If you overeat at an event, simply see what you can learn from the experience to help you plan for the next occasion.

Finally, in the spirit of holiday giving, pause for a second thought before giving gifts of food. While a traditional gift of homemade candy may be sincerely appreciated, it also makes avoiding weight gain that much more difficult for the recipient. Non-food gifts or gifts of healthy snacks may be a real treat for the person who doesn't want to add a holiday pound.

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