

Heft for the Holidays How to Hold Off Those Extra Pounds

Indulge in rich foods over the holiday season and you may wind up paying the price in extra pounds. While research shows that most people don't gain as much weight as they fear they will over the holidays, many can't seem to lose their holiday pounds afterward. The extra weight can build up over the years and contribute to obesity later in life. Why not make this the year you reverse the trend and stop gaining weight over the holidays?

"Weight gain over the holidays is a large part of the typical weight gain that adults have over the years," says Dr. Jack Yanovski, head of the Unit on Growth and Obesity at NIH. He and his colleagues found that almost all the weight people had gained over the course of a year could be explained by the pounds they added over the holiday period. That's why it's particularly important to make sure you maintain your weight during the holiday season.

Maintaining weight is a matter of balance—energy balance. If you take in more **calories** than you burn in physical activity, you store the extra energy around your body, mostly as fat, and gain weight. To maintain your weight, you need to balance the energy you take in with the energy you burn.



Definition

Calories

The amount of energy stored in food. When you eat more calories than your body can use, you store that extra energy, mostly as fat, and gain weight.

Karen Donato, coordinator of NIH's Obesity Education Initiative, points out that you don't have to balance your calories every day. "It's the balance over time that determines whether you can maintain a healthy weight in the long run," she says.

Yanovski explains that our bodies' energy controls are very accurate. "Over the course of the year," he says, "the average adult

consumes about 912,500 calories." Someone who eats just an extra 4,050 calories or so a year will gain a pound over the course of that year. That's only about 11 calories a day. To put this in perspective, break a rice cake into 4 pieces or a pretzel rod into 10. One piece is 11 calories.

"You can see that very small imbalances that would be easy to miss could account for the average weight gain that we see," Yanovski says.

Genetics and other factors affect how your body uses the calories you consume. Still, the only way to gain weight is by taking in more calories than you burn. If you're overweight, talk to your doctor about how to lose those extra pounds. Many NIH-funded researchers, including Yanovski's team, are working to understand the complex causes of obesity and to

develop better ways to combat it.

If you keep your weight in check for most of the year but have trouble during the holidays, Yanovski offers some advice that might help.

First, be active. In their study of holiday weight gain, Yanovski and his team noted that people who reported being much more active maintained their weight or even lost weight during the holidays. Those who reported being less active gained the most during this period. If

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Wise Choices Holding Off Holiday Weight Gain

Here are some tips for keeping weight off during the holidays:

- **Physical activity.** People who are more active are more likely to maintain their weight during the holidays.
- **Limit alcohol consumption.** Alcohol can be a major source of hidden calories.
- **Limit soda and other sweetened beverages.** These drinks add extra calories, too.
- **Schedule holiday food celebrations**

at normal meal times. Celebrations outside of normal meal times encourage people to pile on extra calories.

- **Choose foods with fewer calories.** Foods with fewer calories for their size make you feel fuller sooner.
- **Use smaller plates.** The bigger your plate and the more food that's on it, the more you're likely to eat in the end.
- **Eat a healthy snack beforehand.** You'll be less likely to eat a lot of fattening food at the party.
- **Weigh yourself daily.** And plan how you'll get back on track if your weight begins to creep up.

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you exercise regularly, keep it up over the holidays. If you're not active now, get started and make a serious New Year's resolution to stick with it. Add physical activity to your daily routine, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or walk briskly in the mall. If a holiday party includes dancing, join in!

If you have any control over the scheduling of holiday food celebrations, make them at normal meal times. Holding celebrations outside of normal meal times encourages people to pile on excess calories. If your celebration is at a regular meal time, revelers will be more likely to eat responsibly.

When you're at a holiday celebra-

tion, watch out for soda and other sweetened beverages. A 12-ounce can of soda can have more than 150 calories. A 16-ounce glass of punch or lemonade can have over 200 calories. Don't overdo natural fruit juices, either, since they also carry many calories. It's best to go with calorie-free bottled water, plain or sparkling, when it's available. Diet beverages made with artificial sweeteners can help you control your calories at celebrations, although drinking them on a regular basis may not help with long-term weight control.

Alcohol can be a major source of hidden calories as well. A single shot of liquor, about 2 ounces, is nearly 125 calories. A 5-ounce glass of wine or a 12-ounce glass of beer is about



Web Sites

- <http://win.niddk.nih.gov/>
- www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/learn-it/balance.htm
- www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/tips.htm
- http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2005/July2005/docs/O1features_01.htm

160. Sweet mixed drinks have even more calories. An 8-ounce margarita, for example, has 240 calories.

Choose foods that are lower in energy density, meaning they have fewer calories for their size. You'll feel fuller sooner and take in fewer calories. So, for example, start out your meal with a salad or soup. Skip the second helpings of stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy; go for more vegetables instead. If you're bringing dessert, serve angel food cake, ginger bread or fruit instead of brownies, pound cake or chocolate cake.

One good strategy is to try to avoid high-fat foods. Fat in itself may not be the key to weight control as people once thought, but it does have high energy density. If you cut back on foods that are high in fat, you'll likely cut down on the calories. So use low-fat or skim milk instead of whole milk or half-and-half. Skip the butter. Eat your turkey without the skin. And cut away the visible fat from meats.

Other strategies are to eat a healthy snack before a holiday celebration to avoid overeating later, and to use smaller plates when they're available. Yanovski says, "There's pretty good evidence to suggest that the bigger the plate and the more food that's on the plate, the more people will eat at a given meal."

No matter how much you weigh, it's wise to watch your weight over the holidays. It's better to keep it off now than to try to lose it later. ■

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Editor: Harrison Wein, Ph.D.

wein@od.nih.gov

Tel: 301-435-7489 Fax: 301-480-4026

Assistant Editor:

Vicki Contie

National Institutes of Health

Office of Communications
& Public Liaison

Building 31, Room 5B64

Bethesda, MD 20892-2094

Contributors: Vicki Contie, Erika Elvander, Margaret Georgiann (illustrations), Marsha Love and Harrison Wein

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The Vexing Pain of Vulvodynia

Giving Attention to a “Private Problem”

If you've never heard of the term vulvodynia, you're not alone. You're more likely to hear women refer to it as “the pain down there” or “feminine pain.” Although an estimated 14 million American women may have it at one point in their lives, few people are aware that the condition has a name. Even health care providers may not be familiar with it. This can lead to multiple doctor visits and delayed diagnosis and treatment for some women.

Women with vulvodynia have lasting and unexplained pain in their genitals—specifically in the vulva, the outer area around the opening of the vagina. Vulvodynia can greatly interfere with a woman's life. It may feel uncomfortable to exercise, have sex or take part in social activities. The most common symptom is a burning feeling. Women also report stabbing pain, stinging or irritation. Symptoms are most common in women 18-25 years old. They're less likely to appear after age 35, although older women have also reported symptoms.

No one knows for sure what causes vulvodynia, in part because it hasn't been studied much in the past. Some researchers think it stems from irritation of the nerves around the vulva

or an abnormal response to infection or injury. Medical researchers continue to investigate possible causes and treatments.

If you experience pain in the genital area, it's important to see your doctor and discuss your symptoms. Your health care provider should ask for your thorough medical history and give you a pelvic exam. The doctor may also conduct laboratory tests to rule out bacterial and fungal infections, which can have similar painful symptoms.

Although there is no cure for vulvodynia, some of its symptoms can be treated. Experts often recommend a combination of treatments. You and your health care provider should work together to develop a treatment strategy that reduces your pain and discomfort. ■



Web Sites

- <http://orwh.od.nih.gov/health/vulvodynia.html>
- www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/Vulvodynia.cfm



Wise Choices Treating Vulvodynia

Health care professionals may recommend several approaches for treating vulvodynia:

Lifestyle Changes

- Avoid using perfumed tampons and pads, bubble baths, soaps, sprays and douches that may irritate genital tissue.
- Use laundry detergent designed for sensitive skin.
- Rinse the vulva with cool to lukewarm water after urination and in the shower.

- Try wearing white, 100% cotton underwear and loose-fitting pants or skirts.
- For some women, it helps to eliminate highly acidic and sugary foods from the diet. Talk with your doctor before making dietary changes.

Medical Approaches

- Pain-relief cream, like lidocaine ointment, can be applied to the vulva.
- Oral medicines, especially different types of antidepressants, sometimes help with pain relief. Other medicines, like antiseizure

drugs, are sometimes used for their pain-blocking properties, although they are not FDA-approved for treating vulvodynia. Ask your doctor about various medications and their side effects.

- Physical therapy, including pelvic muscle exercises, may help prevent muscle spasms and pain.
- Complementary and alternative medical approaches—including acupuncture, hypnosis, massage therapy, relaxation techniques and biofeedback—may help with long-lasting pain. Discuss these options with your health care provider.

Health Capsules

Treatment for Depressed Teens

Teenage depression is a serious concern. By some estimates, about 5% of adolescents suffer with major depression. A new NIH-funded study has found that the best treatment for depressed teens may be a combination of talk therapy and medicine.

Researchers looked at 439 adolescents diagnosed with depression. They were 12-17 years old when the study began. Some were treated only with the depression-fighting drug fluoxetine—also known as Prozac. Others had talk therapy sessions with a mental health professional but no medicine. A third group had a combination of talk therapy and medicine.

The study showed that combination therapy was the most effective overall. After 18 weeks, 85% of teens taking the combination treatment got better, but less than 70% of those taking only the drug or talk therapy improved. Even after 36

weeks, combination therapy continued to help more teens than the other approaches.

Early in the study, the researchers found that teens who took fluoxetine alone reported suicidal thinking, especially in the early stages of therapy. Adding talk therapy seemed to help vulnerable teenagers steer clear of suicidal thoughts.

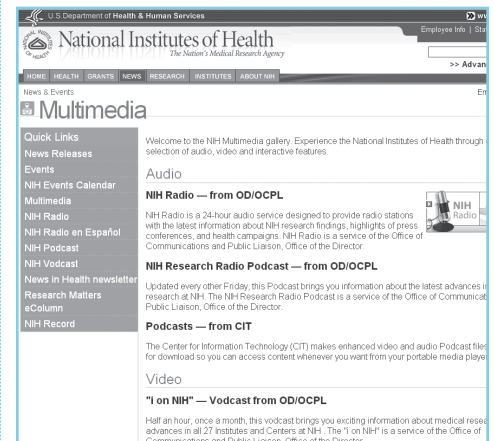
The study included a mix of younger and older teens, from different ethnic and racial groups and a range of social and economic backgrounds, so the researchers say their results should apply to the adolescent population overall. ■



Featured Web Site NIH Multimedia Gallery

www.nih.gov/news/multimedialogallery.htm

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Web Sites

- www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml
- www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression-a-treatable-illness.shtml



Wise Choices Signs of Depression

Depression is a serious medical illness that can interfere with your everyday life. Talk with your doctor if you experience some of these symptoms for a week or more:

- Sad or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt or worthlessness
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Trouble sleeping or oversleeping
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed
- Loss of energy
- Thoughts of death or suicide

African Americans and Kidney Disease

Are you at risk for kidney disease? It affects people of all races, but African Americans are at higher risk, mostly because they have higher rates of diabetes and high blood pressure, the two leading causes of kidney disease. Other risk factors include heart disease and a family history of kidney disease.

Kidney disease is difficult to detect in its early stages, because it doesn't make you feel sick. That's why tests are needed to catch kidney disease as soon as possible. If it's not treated, kidney disease can lead to kidney failure. Then, your only options are

dialysis or a kidney transplant.

NIH has created a new easy-to-read brochure called *Kidney Disease: What African Americans Need to Know*. It helps to explain the connections between risk factors and kidney disease. It describes the simple blood and urine tests doctors use to find kidney disease. It also offers tips for keeping your kidneys healthy.

Take the first step. Talk to your doctor or nurse about your kidneys and ask if you should be tested for kidney disease. Get the new brochure by visiting www.nkdep.nih.gov or calling 1-866-4KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639). ■



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<http://health.nih.gov>