

Holidays: Health Edition

Dealing with Stress and Simplifying the Mess

It's time for the holidays! With the holidays come snack foods, more time indoors, less exercise, and more alcohol. This temptation isn't necessarily all bad, but it can sometimes make enjoying the holidays more stressful. Here are some tips for enjoying the holidays while preserving your physical and mental health.

Holiday Weight

The colder season means less activity, increased snacking, and holiday feasts, making it difficult to stay in shape. Weight gain can increase depression and anxiety as well. Avoiding those extra calories can be challenging, but there are ways to limit excessive eating and manage a healthier lifestyle.

Mall Power-walk

Figuring out what gifts to buy for friends and family can be time consuming, so why not turn it into a fun fat-burning exercise? Take a small notebook and pen with you to the mall and start the hunt. You don't have to buy anything, just go from store to store jotting down items, who they are for, and the price. This practice can actually save you money by comparing prices for certain gifts as well as burn off the holiday desserts.

Pre-party Snacking

Going to a party on an empty stomach can lead to more plates of rich cakes and treats instead of healthier alternatives at home; resulting in that uncomfortable engorged feeling during a holiday event. If you also drink alcohol at a party, you are likely to eat more, or become more intoxicated if you have not eaten beforehand. The solution is to eat a light snack, such as a small salad or sandwich, before attending festivities where scrumptious sweets are available. Not all snacking is bad!

Holiday Drinking

You work all year long at a stressful job which means during the holidays, you should drink all the alcohol you can handle, right? Maybe not.... Drinking four or more drinks in a row for women and five or more in a row for men is considered binge drinking, which is a form of alcohol abuse. This can be detrimental to your body, mental health, and those around you. Many use the excuse of vacation from work to drink to their hearts content, often sinking into depression or disrupting family events, which can damage relationships. In addition to these risks, drunk drivers cause more and more devastation on the roads each year, particularly during this season.

Party Hopping

With so many events planned with families and friends, some find themselves traveling from one party to the next after having more than the legal amount of alcohol in their bodies. This can change a perfect holiday into a tragic mistake. Manage your drinking by deciding which parties to drink at and have a back-up plan for transportation in the event

that you do not feel safe to drive. Keep in mind that you may not feel those last few drinks until you are already on the road, so leave approximately one and a half to two hours between the last drink and when you decide to drive in order to accurately estimate your level of inebriation. Taxis or friends should be made readily available to ensure safe passage home.

Alcohol as a Crutch

The holidays aren't always filled with happy memories. There may be unresolved family conflict which tempts you into excessive drinking in order to "get by" during the holidays. Using alcohol as a crutch is a slippery slope that can worsen most situations. Alcohol acts as a depressant, slowing heart rate and relaxing tension; however these can be negative affects for someone experiencing depression. This can lead to self-destructive behavior, fighting, and even suicide. If you find that you are seeking alcohol to "cure" the holiday blues, try speaking with a friend or seek counseling. A licensed psychologist is trained to handle difficult situations such as this, and they can provide long-lasting results compared with the temporary numbing that comes from drinking. Together, you can devise a plan to alleviate stress and prevent depressive episodes, resulting in a healthier lifestyle and a happier you.

Resources

http://stress.about.com/od/holidaysurvivalguide/ht/family_conflict.htm

<http://ezinearticles.com/?5-Holiday-Weight-Loss-Tips-and-Their-Reality-Checks&id=102551>