

# WHY WEIGHT FOR CHRISTMAS?



**M**uch of the media reports that Americans average a weight gain ranging from 7-10 pounds during the holiday season. In addition, self-report studies tell us that people believe that they gain 5 pounds or more over the holidays, but that does not necessarily mean that they do. Research from the New England Journal of Medicine (<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM200003233421206>) indicates that the average weight gain may actually be much less than most people estimate. The study found that the average weight gain from mid-November to mid-January was less than 1 lb! Less than 10% of the participants gained 5lbs or more. However, the weight gain during the holiday season was significantly greater than that during the pre- or post-holiday period, and the holiday weight-gain was not lost over the course of the year.

So, what does this study tell us? First of all, it tells us that the idea that the average person gains large amounts of weight during the holidays is completely untrue. On a somewhat more serious note, the study also tells us that on average, people do gain a small but significant amount of weight over the holiday which is maintained throughout the course of the year. This small amount of weight gain is not enough to warrant holiday fear, but is enough to cause some concern – a pound or two a year can add up over time. It is an issue which is worth following. Although the holidays are not the best time to embark on a weight loss program, setting a goal of weight maintenance over the next 2- 3 months is an excellent strategy.

Here are a few tips to help maintain a healthy weight and maintain energy and well-being throughout the holiday season:

- If you are going to or hosting a party, bring or serve a healthy, tasty dish yourself. You'll know there is something there you can enjoy.
- Eat a healthy snack before a holiday. This will help curb your appetite and prevent overeating.
- Eat foods that are the healthiest for you first, such as veggies, fruit, and lean meat. This will leave little room for too many foods that are not good for you.
- Eat breakfast the day of the party and every day. Research indicates that eating breakfast will help prevent overeating.
- Consider keeping track of what you are eating, especially if you are having trouble with your weight. Keep a holiday food intake journal to help you stay on track with your goals.
- Choose your indulgences wisely: look over the spread before you dig in. Don't waste your calories on items that you can get all the time. Save the high calorie consumption for special items that are unique to the season.
- If overeating on holiday treats at work is a problem, try keeping some healthy snacks available to snack on instead.
- Take sensible portions and use small plates and small serving utensils. Research shows that both will help decrease your intake by 30-57%.
- Keep up the exercise. If you cannot get in a full 30 minutes of activity at one time, break it up into two or three 10-15minutes blocks of time.