



Exercise for the health of it

My sister seems to think she can eat as much as she wants over the holidays and not gain weight as long as she exercises more. I'm skeptical. Who's right?

It really depends. The key is to balance calories you take in with the calories you use up.

But most weight-loss specialists say a combination of diet and exercise — not one or the other — is what's needed, especially when indulging in special treats.

That makes sense. Figure it this way: If you estimate an average Christmas cookie has about 100 calories, and your sister eats as many as she wants — say, five? — that's 500 calories she will need to work off if she doesn't cut back calories somewhere else. For a 160-pound person, that's an extra hour of high-impact aerobics, or nearly two extra hours of walking at a moderate to brisk pace. And that's just to counterbalance the cookies. It doesn't count any other bouts of excess.

Recent research backs up this line of thinking. A Texas Tech University study published in September in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* involved 148 people from mid-November to early January. Half said they regularly exercised almost five hours a week. The others didn't exercise regularly.

Guess what? The men in the study gained an average of two pounds during the holidays, and women

gained about a pound. Participants who were obese tended to gain more. But the amount of exercise a person engaged in just didn't seem to make a difference. The researchers weren't sure why; it could be that people who exercised a lot also consumed more calories. The study wasn't designed to answer that question.

Still, your sister's idea has merit: Physical activity offers more benefits than just expending calories.

In fact, another study, published in November in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, indicates that you're never too old to reap those benefits.

The study involved data from 3,500 people who took part in the English Longitudinal Study of Aging between 2002-03 and 2010-11. With an average age of 64, every two years the participants reported their level of physical activity.

After eight years, the researchers found that those who engaged in moderate or vigorous physical activity at least once a week were three to four times more likely to remain healthy.

While the study doesn't prove cause-and-effect, it's clear that engaging in exercise — during the holidays and year-round — can be the gift that keeps on giving.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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