



Take time to focus as holidays loom

I lost a lot of weight years ago, but I always struggle during the holidays. How can I make sure I maintain my weight over the next few months?

You're right that holidays pose a challenge when it comes to weight management. There are typically so many special occasions and gatherings that involve indulgent food and drink that it's very easy to forsake healthful habits.

Apparently, this can be more of a challenge for people who have successfully taken off weight than for people who have never struggled with weight issues.

A 2008 study in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* compared holiday experiences of people who had previously lost a lot of weight (averaging about 75 pounds) and kept off much of it, and those who had always maintained a healthful weight.

The researchers found those in the first group were more vulnerable to weight gain in November and December and less likely to be able to shed those pounds in January. Even though they made greater efforts to control their eating and stay active, their attention to weight and eating during the holidays decreased significantly more than their always-normal-weight counterparts.

The authors suggested that people who have previously been obese need to work harder than others to manage their weight, and that the demands of the holiday season may overpower

the resources they normally use to focus on weight control.

What could be most helpful, they suggested, is to find ways to focus on and monitor eating, weight and physical activity during such a challenging period.

How do you do that? Trying these strategies might help:

- Practice "mindful eating," in which you deliberately find ways to become aware of what you eat and why you eat it. There are a wide range of approaches you can use, from reducing (or even eliminating) distractions while you eat to eating with your non-dominant hand. See www.thecenterformindfuleating.org for information. At a holiday gathering, see if you can choose not to eat when talking with others, and then take just a small portion of a favorite food and savor each bite.

- Revisit strategies that have worked for you in the past, including monitoring your weight and food intake. If you have a lapse, don't dwell on it. Just use the experience to redouble your efforts afterward.

- Take time for yourself — whether it's to enjoy a hot cup of tea or a 20-minute daily walk — during the busy holiday season. Slowing down can help keep you centered and focused on what's important.

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, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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