

Revolutionary Transformations

Top 5 Tips to Avoid Holiday Bulge

by: Alicia Franklin-Edwards

Tis' the season to be eating! From Thanksgiving until New Year's, we are on a never-ending feast -- inundated with potlucks, parties, and King George IV spreads. There is certainly no famine for most of us, just feast, feast, feast! And, our expanding circumference can validate that fact. While reports indicate the average person gains 7-10 pounds during the holidays, that's average, and doesn't include those who tip the scale at an extra 15 pounds or more. Then, we desperately work to lose the excess beginning January 1st. To our amazement, it takes months to shed what took only weeks to gain, which is why most give up by February 1st.

Holiday weight gain is due to not only all the temptations everywhere we turn, but more so the emotional stress of the season. The crazy schedule, party planning, shopping, baking, decorating, and gift-wrapping are enough to make you crazy. And, we certainly don't have time to workout. Not to mention trying to meet others' expectations, seeing relatives that we haven't seen for a while, and the traditional family fight that breaks out usually right after dinner between Aunt Jean and Cousin Jim. No wonder we look to food for peace and comfort. Speaking of peace, you know the song that says, "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men?" Well, the holidays, when you really think about, can be far from such and the temptation is to turn to food.

Perhaps you are one of those who really enjoy the scurrying around, doing this and that, and running here and there. You love twinkling lights, the smell of cookies baking (while the taste is much better), and spending time with your family. Maybe you delight in the traditional message surrounding the holidays – love, joy, and peace. You like how people reach out and share with those who are in need. However, you wish there was a way to enjoy the season without looking a little more like Santa by the time it's all over.

So how do you maintain your weight through all of it - or for some of us - our sanity? As someone who once weighed 305 lbs. and has managed to keep off 175 lbs., I know what it's like during this time of year and offer these simple secrets that you can start today.

1. **Weigh-in** – Do you know how much you weigh? Not how much do you “think” you weigh. Some of us still quote our weight from our last doctor's visit (and how long ago was that?). Most of us are in denial about our weight and avoid that nasty little scale. Once we come to know reality, we are faced with the choice of doing something about it. Knowing your weight provides a baseline for weight maintenance. While we can feel weight increases and decreases in our clothes, nothing is more “in-your-face” than seeing that number pop-up on the scale. For years, I didn't own a scale, because I honestly didn't want to know my weight.

Contrary to popular belief, current research indicates that when working towards or trying to maintain a specific goal, it's best to weigh yourself every day. Daily weigh-ins allows you to take corrective measures immediately versus continuing a pattern that is counterproductive to your goal unknowingly for an entire week. It also helps you to get in

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tune with your body. I can easily gain a few pounds overnight (and it's not always water retention), and I know exactly what I ate the day before that caused the extra pounds.

The best time to weigh-in is first thing in the morning, without clothing, and with an empty bladder. To determine if weight gain is due to water retention or dietary habits, a more accurate measurement is best achieved by weighing yourself daily and calculating an average of the last few days. If the scale goes up one day, rather than get discouraged, see it as motivation for the next day. Look at your eating and exercise habits, and alter your course. Weighing myself daily has been one of the best secrets to helping me maintain my weight for years. So, go find a scale and weigh-in right now!

2. Watch Emotional Eating - The holidays can be very emotional and cause us to experience both negative and positive feelings. However, it's usually the negative emotions that get us in trouble. This can be one of the most depressing times of the year for some. It is critical that we are aware of our natural tendency to seek food as a source of comfort and keep our emotions in check.

Have you ever eaten something and didn't realize you ate it until it was all gone? That's usually because we are either doing or thinking about something else at the same time. While multitasking is an admired skill in the working world (and even that is now being debated), it's not recommended when eating. Mindless eating can sabotage all plans for maintaining our weight, especially during the holidays.

How often have you reached out to a candy bar, bag of chips, or for some of us who are health conscious, Snackwells, when you were upset? Although touted as a healthy alternative to cookies, downing a box of Snackwells isn't much better than eating a few donuts. I know what you are thinking. Might as well just go ahead and eat the donuts. Wrong! I've overdosed on oatmeal and raisins, because I don't buy or keep unhealthy snacks in the house, so that's all I had. See, it's not necessarily what you eat, but more importantly how much you eat and why. Are you truly hungry or are you using food to fill a void and meet an emotional need?

When you feel stressed or find yourself frustrated at the sales counter over the item that wouldn't scan at the correct price and it took ten minutes to get it right, stop and take a breath or two, if needed. Instead of running to get one of those mega cinnamon rolls as soon as you do finally check out, get in tune with your emotions. Recognize your frustration and resist the urge to turn to food. Or, better yet go take a brisk walk instead. Meditation is also good for calming the soul. Whatever you do, ensure that it is a healthy release of your stress and one that you will feel good about afterwards.

3. Don't skip meals – Have you ever forced yourself to go all day without eating because you were attending a big social event later? Since you didn't want to extend beyond your daily caloric intake, you figured you could hold out and just eat one meal. As fate would have it, everywhere you turned there was food, and all you could think about was food all day. You couldn't wait to get to the party and once you arrived, you quickly made friends with the buffet and compensated for the meals you missed, plus ate

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enough to hold you over until the next day for good measure. Guess you can tell that I've been there.

Despite the lie that we continue to believe, research shows that skipping meals and eating only once a day does not support healthy weight management and actually leads to binging. Starving ourselves and then gorging simply packs on the pounds, because we end up eating at least twice as much as normal. Plus, our metabolism slows down when we do not eat at regular intervals. When we finally eat, our bodies are so overjoyed and relieved, instead of properly processing the food, it stores it as fat, because it doesn't know how long it will be before the next meal comes along.

Eat your regular scheduled meal (perhaps a smaller portion) so that you are not in starvation mode when you attend social events. If the event is being held during your normal mealtime, eat proportionately according to what you would regularly eat. Another trick to keep yourself from going overboard is to eat a small snack, like a piece of fruit beforehand, to take the edge off your hunger. Drinking water before meals also helps give a sense of fullness so that you are less likely to overeat.

4. **Plan** – You've heard the saying, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Well, it's true. Consider your effort to maintain your weight during the holidays as a little road trip. All road trips require a map, or for those who prefer, GPS. Either way, in order to reach your destination you need to plan your journey. Not planning your meals leaves room for haphazard choices, meal skipping, and ultimately binging.

Remember to start the day with a healthy breakfast and instead of eating out, take your lunch (consider all the money you can save). Keep healthy snacks at the office and with you at all times, so that you do not have any excuse for stopping at the drive-thru or popping coins in the candy machine. I always travel with a bottle of water, a piece of fruit, and a granola bar, just in case something happens and I do not get an opportunity to eat as scheduled.

5. **Workout** – While time may be an issue, you can't afford not to workout during the holidays. While you are not trying to lose weight, the same weight loss concept applies – energy (calories) +/- expenditure (exercise) = +/- weight. Meaning, if you are going to eat more, you must workout more, or for those who do not already exercise, you must incorporate physical activity into your day. Exercise does for your metabolism the same thing that fuel does to a car – it revs it up! Regular exercise keeps your metabolism burning at a constant rate so that it can properly process food instead of storing it as fat, as we mentioned in Tip 3.

If you currently exercise, either increase the intensity or add ten extra minutes to your routine. Due to time, I recommend the former. However, if you do not currently workout, start with walking for 30 minutes, four days a week. Walking is the most basic and least impact activity that you can perform. It doesn't require know-how, just do what you were born to do, but at a brisk pace. Your workout doesn't have to be completed all at the same time. You can break it up according to what works best for your schedule. Sometimes

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due to time constraints, I spend 20 minutes in the morning and another 15 minutes in the evening, which doesn't seem as long as doing it all at once.

Also, be sure to do something that you enjoy doing. Not everyone enjoys the elliptical (although it's one of the best cardio fat-burning machines around). Other secrets to getting in extra physical activity throughout the day include taking the stairs, carrying bags, walking the mall, and parking further away. Sneak in a few extra minutes of activity each day and watch the results. Working out has been the biggest secret for me to enjoy an occasional fresh-baked holiday cookie.

If you weigh-in daily, keep your emotions in check, eat regular meals, plan your day, and increase your physical activity, you will see results not only during the holidays, but those that will last for a lifetime.

Tis' the season!

Alicia

I invite you to join me on my blog as I offer other tips to help you avoid the holiday bulge and enter the New Year feeling good about yourself. We will engage in an open and frank dialogue that will not only challenge and inspire you to maintain your weight during the holidays, but also make lifestyle changes that enhance your total well-being so that you can enjoy optimal health.

Alicia Franklin-Edwards, life strategist and founder of Revolutionary Transformations, a life coaching practice specializing in total wellness – spirit, mind, and body – believes, “If you want it, make it happen.” As a speaker, writer, and mentor, Alicia motivates others to pursue their dreams with passion and live with purpose. Her lifelong battle and success with overcoming obesity is what ignited her desire to support others who struggle with their weight. She believes that everyone should live life to the fullest and enjoy optimal wellness. Alicia creates individual wellness plans for her clients, and conducts group coaching programs. She also enjoys sharing her 15-year, 175lb. weight loss success story and is available to speak to your group.

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