

How to Bypass Those Holiday Pounds

When you think of the Christmas season, what comes to mind first? Pretty packages? Gingerbread cookies? Gaining weight?

Although many people estimate they gain more than five pounds during the holidays, most of us don't put on nearly that much. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that most Americans gain only about a pound between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. That sounds like good news, but it's not—the researchers also found that most people *never lose that pound*. So packing on an extra holiday pound each year contributes to obesity later in life.

Let's analyze that sneaky holiday pound. It takes 3,500 calories to create a pound of body fat. A mere 100 extra calories each day over the six weeks from Thanksgiving to New Year's would easily rack up over a pound of fat. What equals 100 calories? One iced cookie. Four or five chocolate kisses. Just two ounces of eggnog. Calories from holiday treats add up incredibly fast!

As a reaction to holiday food temptations, sometimes people decide to start a weight loss plan. But the last six weeks of the year are not the best time for attempting to shed pounds—you may end up feeling deprived and lose your holiday cheer. A more sensible goal is maintaining your current weight. Instead of loosening your belt and welcoming that holiday pound, go on the offensive this year and bypass it.

The Reason for the Season

Before we strategize about foiling that pound, let's get back to basics by revisiting that first question: When you think of Christmas, what comes to mind first? Jesus! It's a celebration of His birthday. As Christians, we want to honor Jesus with

our words, deeds, and conduct during His birthday season. If we keep a proper perspective on Christmas, we can focus on what's most important, and it's NOT the holiday food.

At this time of year, magazines and Web sites run countless articles on healthy holiday eating. They list ideas such as eating a healthy snack before you go to a party or drinking water with lemon instead of high-calorie beverages. These strategies are helpful and can keep us mindful of what we eat. However, relying solely on dieting tips keeps the focus on ourselves and on food.

Instead, let's turn our hearts toward loving others and experiencing the joy of the season. For a different approach, try the acrostic "PEWS" to outsmart that holiday pound while honoring Jesus.

P is for Prayer

Fortify yourself with prayer. God knows it is hard for you to eat sensibly when faced with an array of holiday goodies. Ask Him for the strength to stick to a few favorite foods. Ask Him to remove your desire to eat too much and help you focus on showing the love of Christ to others at Christmas parties and dinners. Praise Him for the wonderful body He made for you.

E is for Exercise

One of the best ways to fight that holiday pound and erase extra calories is to move your body. Walking at a brisk pace for half an hour each day can burn 100 calories. A convenient way to rack up 30 minutes is to march in place while watching a television show or football game. Get fresh air while walking the dog, pace around the house while talking on the phone, or grab your sneakers and head to the mall. Make exercise a priority.

W is for Wisdom

When faced with a table of goodies, stop and think. Ask yourself, "Which of these foods are truly worth the calories?" Take small servings of two or three of your favorites and savor them. Move away from the food area as soon as possible and mingle with friends and family. Avoiding second helpings is always wise. What do you think Jesus would do and say at a holiday party? What would He eat and how much? Food for thought.

S is for Scripture

Lots of Christians struggle with food temptation and even gluttony during the holidays. Strengthen your resolve by memorizing encouraging Scripture verses about God's faithfulness. Post them on the fridge or mirror. Before you go to a holiday party, put a verse in your pocket so feeling the paper with your fingertips is a reminder. Here are a few verses to get you started:

- *"And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (I Corinthians 10:13b).*
- *"The Lord delights in the way of the man whose steps He has made firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with His hand" (Psalm 37:23-24).*
- *"He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe" (Proverbs 28:26).*
- *"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).*
- *"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." (Psalm 139:14).*

Holiday treats taste good for an instant, but they are not worth the extra weight that might stay for years. As you head out to Christmas parties and dinners this year, try the PEWS approach to bypass holiday pounds.

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