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Strategies for Success

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When food is abundant, more calories are eaten.

Strategies for Success

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Smaller plates mean smaller waists.

Year-end holidays are a special time when families get together. Thanksgiving and Christmas are celebrated with special foods and family traditions. During this season, there must be an intentional effort to eat fewer calories and find ways to be more active during the cold winter months so we don't have to face the New Year with the challenge to lose those extra pounds.

Studies reveal blood sugar levels are highest during the winter and lowest during the summer. The cold winter holidays with reduced physical activity, excess food intake and body weight gain have a negative impact on blood sugar levels in those persons with either pre-diabetes or diabetes. The markers of cardiovascular disease also are influenced negatively during winter. Among elderly persons, those who had elevated fasting blood sugar levels are substantially more likely to be diagnosed with dementia than those with normal fasting blood sugar levels.



What are some realistic ways to cut calories? Use smaller bowls, spoons and plates. People with large spoons ate 30 percent more soup than those with small spoons. School children serve themselves more food when given adult-size plates and bowls compared to child-size dishware. When adults were given a larger bowl and a bigger ice-cream scoop (3 oz. scoop instead of 2 oz.), they ate 53 percent more ice cream. We think we are getting less food when we eat from large plates. A serving of mashed potatoes appears smaller and to have fewer calories when served on a large plate than when served on a small plate.

When food is abundant, people underestimate how much they eat by 40–50 percent. People typically eat more chips, cookies or crackers that remain at the bottom of a large bag than from a smaller bag.

When people were given a partially-filled bowl of pistachios on their work desk to eat as they like throughout the day, topped off every two hours, those who periodically had the empty shells removed ate 22 percent more nuts than those who left their empty shells on the desk as a visual cue to the nuts consumed.

Researchers at Penn State University compared different strategies to lower the energy density of a meal, thereby getting people to consume fewer calories. The caloric density of entrees was lowered by 20 percent by one of three ways: adding less fat, increasing the fruit/vegetable content (by adding small, chopped pieces), or adding water (by turning a casserole into a soup). Without affecting their feeling of fullness, the volunteers ate 396 fewer calories when the entrees had less fat, 308 fewer calories when fruit and vegetables were increased, and 230 fewer calories when water was added.

Special holiday foods that are high in calories should be eaten less frequently. Avoid snacking, since holiday snack foods typically are high in sugar or fat and rich in calories. Adding more fresh fruit and vegetables (such as broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage) to your meals will help to lower the caloric density of the meals. Nuts and dried fruit can make for a healthier dessert.

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