10 Health Tips for Surviving the Holidays

Thanksgiving is right around the corner, marking the beginning of a 5-week holiday celebration that often spells doom for your health and fitness plan. Along with those celebrations will come headlines and broadcast news stories highlighting the holiday weight gain that thousands of people experience every year.

Ignore them.

Don’t think about weight gain this holiday season – think about celebrating with friends at family while simultaneously enjoying the sensation of living in a body that’s healthy.

Below are 10 tips you can use to change how you think this time of year. The result will make it easier for you to make the right choices – even when a lot of people around you aren’t.

1. It’s not about the actual holidays.

What you do on Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Day isn’t your major concern. It’s all the other days in between that will determine if your holidays are healthful. You may encounter holiday treats at random at work or at home from a kind neighbor bringing you a home-baked gift. These situations are more frequent than a binge on a holiday. Overeating on Thanksgiving Day isn’t going to get you out of shape. Just like doing things right one day isn’t going to get you in shape. It’s all the little things on a daily basis that determine if you are moving toward fitness or away from it.

2. List your top 2-3 favorite treats during the holidays and commit to having only those.

We’ve all got our favorites. List them, and stick to them so you can enjoy your favorites without consuming any “accidental” junk food you weren’t planning on.

3. Let go of perfect.

We don’t expect it in other areas of life – school, work or in with our family members. So why do we expect “perfect” when we think about our fitness routines? You may miss a workout. In fact, everyone will at some point. It’s not the end of the world. Really. Just make sure you get the next one done.

4. Forget your workout routine; just challenge yourself.

You may not have time for your full routine, so don’t do it! Exert yourself for 10 minutes if that’s all you have. Your body responds to the challenge of exercise, not to the amount of time you spend doing it.

5. Focus on what you can do, not what you can’t.

Every year I hear an endless parade of, “I’ve just been so busy with the holidays and family visits, that I couldn’t workout.” This year, focus on what you can do instead of what you can’t. Look for solutions instead of repeatedly dwelling on the problems and obstacles.

6. Ask yourself, “Do I really have to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ?”

There is likely something that you tell yourself you “have to” do that you don’t. Maybe it’s sending out holiday cards to everyone in your address book. Or maybe it’s hosting the family at your house (again!) just like you do every year. You have more choices than you think.

7. Pick your top 5 favorite exercises

Write down your 5 favorite exercises – I’m sure squats will be on everyone’s list this year – and when you need a blast of movement, do all of them for 30 seconds each. It will be easier if they are bodyweight exercises, but you can use anything as long as they are your favorites.

8. Explore fun ways to get the family moving.

Family gatherings usually involve too much food and too much sitting around. Get everyone outside any way you can. Reinvent old traditions in movement-based ways. Instead of sitting around talking about what you’re thankful for, have everyone share that while they’re out on a walk together. Whoever is talking has to walk backward and face the group while they share. Be creative. Too cold? Bundle up – once you’re out and moving, you’ll warm up.

9. Keep sugar off of your vegetables.

I used to hate sweet potatoes. A few years ago, I realized this was due in large part to when I was growing up they were always served with brown sugar and marshmallows. Awful. Let there be no glazing of carrots this year. Sugar has no place on vegetables. There will be enough sugar in your favorite dessert. Glazing is for doughnuts. This year, find ways to make side dishes that are both delicious and nutritious.

10. Remember that the holidays come at the same time every year

Your favorite holiday comes on the same day each year (for the most part). Those annual celebrations won’t catch you by surprise, so there’s no reason why you can’t plan for them. Unknown interruptions to your fitness program like car trouble or sick children can’t always be avoided, but when celebrations come every year there’s no excuse. Use your smarts and creativity combined with some of the tips above to come up with a plan for celebrating that will allow you to enjoy the festivities without wrecking your fitness plan in the process. Keep at it and you’ll get a little better each year!