



Wellness Connection

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Don't Turn to Holiday Food as a Way to Deal With Stress

Instead of eating, cope with problems by taking a walk, calling a friend or reading a book

(HealthDay News) -- People dealing with stress during the holidays who turn to food for comfort could be setting themselves up for weight gain in the New Year, an expert warns.



“Many of us will gain anywhere from seven to 10 pounds from the middle of October through the end of the year because of all the fatty foods available at parties and other gatherings,” said Stefanie Barthmare, a psychotherapist with the Methodist Weight Management Center in

Houston. “If you’re not careful those numbers could easily double very quickly,” she added.

“Getting to the root of your problems and finding better ways to deal with them without food will help you avoid putting on extra unwanted pounds this holiday season,” Barthmare suggested in a hospital news release.

For many people, food is a distraction from what is really troubling them, she noted. “We are using food for coping and comfort -- and of course, we know eating is not the answer,” Barthmare said. “All the food does is cause the number on

the scale to creep up, causing a whole host of problems with health and self-esteem.”

Barthmare offered easy and inexpensive suggestions for ways to cope with stress or problems without turning to food, including:

- Take a walk
- Call a friend
- Read a book

“Join a support group where you can talk about your problems and discover positive ways to fix them without eating,” Barthmare added. “It’s important to interrupt patterns that send you to the pantry.”

She also advised that talking to a counselor or dietician can help people develop healthier coping strategies.

“If it was just a matter of knowing the calorie difference between a piece of cake and broccoli, we would all be our ideal weight,” Barthmare concluded in the news release. “Maintaining a healthy weight requires a disciplined approach mentally and physically. Finding a way to refrain from using food to help you feel better is the key. Unfortunately, it’s complicated and there is not a one-size-fits-all solution.”



*More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more about weight control. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/weightcontrol.html>
-- Mary Elizabeth Dallas*

*SOURCE: Methodist Hospital, Houston, news release
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Persistence Is Key to Losing Weight and Keeping It Off

Mastering any new skill, including eating right and exercising, takes practice, expert says

(HealthDay News) -- Losing weight is one of the most common New Year's resolutions, but changing long-held behaviors is a skill in itself, a medical expert says.

To shed unwanted pounds and keep them off, people have to be ready to face some setbacks and keep on trying, said Dr. Jessica Bartfield, an internal medicine and medical weight-loss specialist at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital, part of the Loyola University Health System.

"People need a motivation to lose weight and the new year is an opportunity to start fresh," Bartfield said in a Loyola news release. "Behavior change is the cornerstone of healthy, successful weight loss and it takes about three months to establish a new behavior," she pointed out.

"When you learn to ride a bike, you expect that you will fall down a couple times and are prepared to try again and get back on; you need to have the same expectation with weight loss and to plan accordingly," she explained.

Only 20 percent of Americans who've tried to lose weight will keep the weight off after one year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Bartfield offered the following tips to help reverse this trend and help people achieve and maintain their weight-loss goals:



Don't skip breakfast. "Eating within one hour of awakening can boost your metabolism up to 20 percent for the rest of the day," Bartfield said. "Eating something is better than eating nothing, but ideally try to incorporate protein for longer-lasting fuel."

Have a weekly weight check. "Monitoring your weight on a weekly basis provides a fairly accurate weight trend and, more importantly, an early detection of any weight regain, which allows you to adjust behaviors accordingly," Bartfield said. Exercise for one hour every day. "Snow shoveling, vacuuming, taking the stairs -- you don't have to run like a hamster on a wheel for 60 minutes. Take three 20-minute brisk walks, or compile the one hour based on a series of activities," she advised.

Limit TV to fewer than 10 hours each week. "Many argue they don't have time to exercise, but when I ask them to

count the hours they spend watching TV or surfing the Net, they are able to find the time for activities where they are moving instead of sitting," Bartfield said.

Keep track of your physical activity. "Park your car farther away, take the stairs, manually change TV channels -- these are all simple ways to get more physical activity and you need to write them down as they are performed to keep yourself honest," Bartfield said. "Also wearing a pedometer can help accurately document and track your progress."



Keep track of calories. Do not underestimate how many calories you consume at each meal.

Set clear, realistic goals. Avoid setting vague goals. Objectives need to be specific and attainable. People can start by trying to lose 10 percent of their body weight, Bartfield recommended.

Be consistent. "Eat at regular intervals seven days per week," Bartfield advised. "Being 'good' on the weekdays and then splurging on the weekend creates a harmful cycle that discourages weight loss."

Plan for setbacks. "When you learn to drive, or learn a sport or musical instrument, you make mistakes and you have an experienced instructor -- maybe even several -- to help correct the mistakes and prevent repeats. Enlist a trusted friend, or enroll in a program to learn and master the rules of weight loss," Bartfield said.

When it comes to teenagers who need to lose weight, parents should get involved. "Treating child and adolescent obesity needs to be a family effort; families need to change behaviors," she said. "Research shows that families -- and even couples -- who change behavior together are the most successful."

*More information : The U.S. National Library of Medicine provides more information on weight control.
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*SOURCE: Loyola University Health System, news release
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