



# Tricks for keeping healthy habits through the holidays

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN, M.D.

Dear Dr. Julie, I love the holidays but I'm worried about gaining weight. How can I prevent weight gain through the holiday season?

**C**ONGRATULATIONS on taking the first and most important step in preventing weight gain over the holidays. Recognizing that it will take extra effort to keep your cholesterol and sugars normal and keep your weight under control is the first step in achieving your goal.

There are a few more things you can do to make sure you get your wish of keeping the extra pounds at bay. These steps will seem basic, but what's important to keep in mind is that holiday weight gain is usually a result of losing sight of the healthy habits you keep throughout the rest of the year. Being extra vigilant about maintaining your current habits can make all the difference in the world.

**First, remember to sleep and exercise.** Both things are very important for de-stressing and allowing your body's metabolism to continue to hum at an efficient rate. Lack of sleep and lack of activity may lead to increased appetite. Keeping both factors steady throughout the year puts you well ahead of the game.

**Second, keeping a nutrition log would be a good idea.** It sets up an additional obstacle to keep you from snacking mindlessly. Mindful eating through a nutrition log will help you to think twice before you dig into the snacks at the holiday cookie stand. I also would recommend drinking a

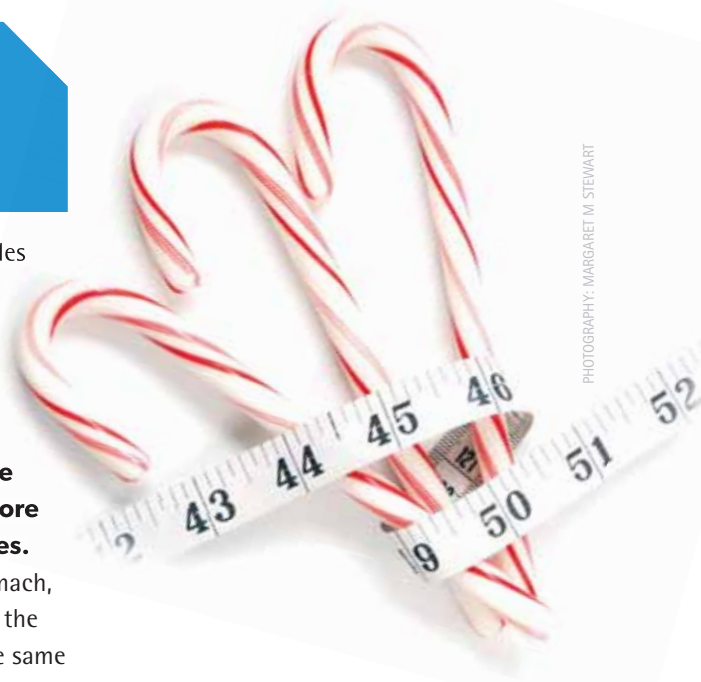
glass of water and eating your vegetables first at every meal to ensure that you are fuller and eat less of the more fattening unhealthy foods.

**Another important point is to eat something healthy and full of fibre and protein first thing in the morning for breakfast and also before you head over to any holiday parties.**

If you start the day with an empty stomach, you are more likely to over-eat later in the day when you are tired and hungry. The same concept applies to parties.

If you go to a party famished, you are less likely to be able to make healthy choices and more likely to over eat. A healthy option for breakfast would be egg whites with vegetables to get your body's metabolism going without too much saturated fat or sugars. A potential pre-party option could be crudités with hummus.

Similarly, eating a healthy meal or snack before you go shopping is a good way to prevent unhealthy snacking at the mall or grocery store. It is important never to buy groceries on an empty stomach. Since you will likely be inundated at work with holiday snacks, do not buy any snack foods to keep at home. Instead, keep fresh cut vegetable crudités, raw nuts and low-glycemic fruits at home for you to eat or snack on when you are hungry.



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**One final tidbit: Carry a purse/clutch or a glass of water in your hand when you are enjoying your office or holiday party.** By doing so, you leave only one hand free and so you'll be less able to carry a big plate of fatty sugary treats. Little tricks like this might mean the difference between being able to fit into your clothes after the holiday season, or not.

Enjoy this time with your loved ones. Make this the focus of the holiday season as well as maintaining your usual healthy habits and you'll find yourself happy and fit well into the warm summer months! **Z**

*Dr. Julie T. Chen, MD, is an integrative medicine physician with her own practice in San Jose, CA. Check out her website at [makinghealthyez.com](http://makinghealthyez.com).*