



NEWS RELEASE

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Don't let the winter holidays weigh you down

*By Chris Halagarda,
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FORT LEE, Va. – It's estimated individuals gain between 1-2 pounds per year and half of that occurs during the winter holiday season, according to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

A pound or two in one year probably doesn't sound too bad, but when you consider a span of 30 years or 30 holiday seasons, that means an extra 30-60 pounds. So, if you were a svelte 150 pounds in your early 20s and you followed this trend, you could weigh as much as 210 pounds now. To add insult to injury, if you haven't been strength training during those three decades, you have most likely lost a lot of the muscle you had when you were younger.

The extra weight and lost muscle present a clear and potential disaster for your heart health – in addition to putting you at a higher risk for diabetes, joint pain, sleep disorders and a myriad of other diseases. So how do we stop this madness? What will you do to stop this trend in 2012?

Fighting the “battle of the bulge” during the holidays isn't easy, but the guidelines below are your best shot at success. You'll notice there are no magic pills or gadgets, but most research articles support these methods.

- **“Stop the train before putting it in reverse.”** In short, this means stop gaining weight before thinking about losing it. This is a change of mindset rather than an actionable task, but a new attitude is where many of us need to start. In this era of “The Biggest Loser” and “Celebrity Weight Loss,” many people have false expectations about how much

weight can be lost in the real world. This season's first goal should be: "I will not gain any weight between now and New Year's Day;" and, "Don't start on New Year's Day. Start now!"

- **Weigh yourself often.** Some people get a little nervous about this. Obviously, if you've ever had an eating disorder and been told by your health-care provider to avoid weighing yourself, then please follow their instructions. Otherwise, weigh yourself often – one or two times per week – first thing in the morning. This is an awareness tool. Your weight will fluctuate slightly because of sodium intake and water-weight changes; so don't worry about 1-2 pound increases and decreases. Make a change in your eating habits, if you are adding a pound every time you step on the scale. Research shows that college students who weigh themselves regularly are less likely to gain weight.
- **Wear a pedometer.** During this season, exercise programs seem to be thrown to the wayside like fall leaves and wrapping paper. It's OK to miss a workout, especially if you stay physically active. Wear a pedometer and aim for more than 10,000 steps a day. Physical activity throughout the day is just as important as a tough hour in the gym. If you find that you get less than 5,000 steps a day, make 7,500 steps your first goal.
- **Strength train.** Get to the gym! Actually, you don't have to go to the gym to prevent muscle wasting and increase lean muscle. Just do a strength-training workout two to three days per week with your own body weight, resistance bands, dumbbells, barbells, suspension straps, kidney bean cans or whatever else you have available. If you have limited experience with strength training, I recommend going to a fitness center and hiring a certified personal trainer for a couple of sessions. If you plan on working out in your living room, on a walking path or in your backyard, tell your trainer what equipment you have or don't have. If they're worth their certification, they'll be able to design you a program to suit your needs.
- **Aim for "5 to 9."** News alert: There will be foods high in sugar, saturated fat and trans-fat, better known as "junk food," readily available throughout the winter holiday season. Willpower sometimes helps you avoid eating these foods, but "won't power" works better. If you make it a habit to fill up on water and fiber-dense fruits and vegetables – five to nine selections daily – you won't be hungry, and you won't need to resort to junk food to fill up.
- **Track your success.** Keep a tracking sheet of all the goals mentioned above. Write your goal at the top of the page, and each day that you weigh yourself, write it down. Write

down how many steps you have on your pedometer and what weight-training workouts you have done. Keep track of how many and what kind of vegetables and fruits you ate and where you ate them. Even write down how you felt throughout the day after workouts, after you eat and so on. If you splurge, write down where you were, what you ate and how you felt afterward, along with a plan for what you will do next time to avoid overeating.

Preventing a few pounds of weight gain may not sound as “sexy” as losing weight, but it’s simply the first step in a well-planned process of “putting the train in reverse.” After you succeed at maintaining your weight, you’ll be ready to set new goals for success.

By the way, you can find all the water, nutritious meals and fruits and vegetables at your commissary at savings that will take plenty of weight off of your budget. Have a wonderful holiday season, and start your plan for improving your health and fitness today.

— *Chris Halagarda is the Navy Fitness, Performance Enhancement Dietitian. Feel free to contact him with your questions at (202) 433-0721 or Chris.Halagarda@Navy.Mil.*

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings amounting to thousands of dollars annually. For current savings figures for various groups – single member up to a family of seven – visit <http://www.commissaries.com>. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America’s military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*