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## Surviving the holiday season in good form

**It's so easy to overindulge at the holidays. Here's how to keep looking and feeling your best while you enjoy your share of good cheer.**

By Jeannine Stein

November 22, 2009

The holidays burst upon us every year with a veneer of joyousness, yet that bubbling of good cheer masks a series of rather dire seasonal warnings: Don't eat too many rich, fatty foods; don't drink to excess; don't forsake your exercise routine; and, for goodness sake, get some sleep.



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Does it surprise anyone that even the sensible among us choose to ignore that advice? That we stuff ourselves with sweets, down too much spiked egg nog, skip every personal training appointment, stay out until all hours -- and then fall into bed without brushing our teeth?



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Food, drink, festivities -- there's so much of it around. Elaine Rodino, a psychologist in private practice, knows it's sometimes difficult to resist. "You go to one event where people have cakes and candies and things and you say no, but by the third or fourth one, it's hard to keep saying no."



Why do we bail on our normal routines this time of year, despite knowing that we'll probably pack on the pounds and have to contend with a killer hangover? Rodino believes the holidays bring out the kid in us, and that kid wants it all. "We're probably at our most regressed this time of year," she says, "so we have less impulse control. We want the candies and cookies like children do."

"The holidays are such a multisensory time of year," says Gamila Smith, a Los Angeles-based costume designer and stylist. "The flavors, the smells -- you walk into a bakery and smell the butter and the frosting, and you lose it."

Smith has given up trying to be good this time of year. She loves to treat herself to pumpkin scones, homemade brown butter cookies topped with sea salt, and chocolate-dipped shortbread. "The holidays have so many things you can only get this time of year, you have to go for it. So I indulge and deal with the consequences later."

But there's a way to fall off the wagon and still survive the holidays. By following a few pointers, we can right the wrongs of the previous day and get back to business as usual.

## **Last one to the buffet's a rotten candy cane**

You spent last evening huddled over a plate of prime rib, Yorkshire pudding, creamed spinach and glazed carrots, barely looking up to acknowledge other human beings in the room. The next morning, stomach distended and feet barely able to fit in your shoes due to the salt bloat, you vow not to touch a morsel of food until the sun sets.

Not the best strategy, says Joan Salge Blake, a registered dietitian, spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Assn. and a professor of nutrition at Boston University. Many people think the best antidote to overeating is not eating anything at all, but that only makes hunger pangs grow until you're clawing your way through break-room doughnut crumbs by the end of the day. Think in terms of averages and balance, Blake says. Average out a week's worth of food, not just a day. If you're bad three days out of the week, be good the other four. The day after over-filling your gut, go for lighter foods such as fruits and vegetables.

"These are full of fiber and will fill you up before they fill you out," she says, "so by the end of the day you're not going to have an unplanned, impulsive snack." Add some lean protein (fish, skinless chicken, tofu), and a smattering of healthy fats (olive oil, avocado), and you'll tamp down cravings for more bad stuff.

Drinking alcohol to excess can result in the classic hangover, which has symptoms including headache, nausea and dry mouth. Forgo the funky home remedies and take Blake's advice: "The only thing that cures a hangover is time," she says. Because alcohol can be dehydrating, drink plenty of fluids the next day and don't repeat last night's bender.

Hitting Starbucks for a four-shot whatever the next morning might make you feel perky for a bit, but it's a quick fix that won't erase that sick feeling. Also, Blake warns people to be aware of what else may be in that pick-me-up, such as tons of fat and sugar that will add insult to the injury you did the night before.

## **A brush with danger**

You come home late from a party and fall into bed, completely ignoring the toothbrush waiting for you in the bathroom. Skipping a few nights of brushing and flossing probably won't make your teeth fall out, but there can be some short-term consequences, says Dr. Sigmund Abelson, associate dean of clinical affairs at the USC School of Dentistry. Those sticky, sweet foods that are so plentiful this time of year -- think candy and cookies -- are the worst offenders.

"Those stick into the deep crevices of the teeth," he explains, "and the bacteria in the saliva interacts with the sugar. The bacteria attacks the sugar and metabolizes it to acid, which erodes the teeth and forms pits and causes decay."

Scared now? Good. Upon awakening, head straight for the bathroom for some oral triage: Thoroughly brush the chewing surfaces of the teeth, Abelson says, then floss. "It also wouldn't hurt to use a mouth rinse," he says, "since it does help kill bacteria. This helps mitigate damage from the night before." Adding in another brushing around noon will help as well.

Abelson also suggests chewing sugar-free gum with xylitol, which has been shown in studies to help prevent tooth decay.

## **Losing face**

If you skipped out on brushing your teeth, chances are you also bailed on taking off your makeup and washing your face. That probably won't cause too much trouble if problem skin isn't an issue, but if it is, there may be repercussions.

"Typically the things that cause acne have to do with clogging the pores and oil glands, causing an accumulation of bacteria," says dermatologist Dr. Susan Goodlerner, who has a private practice in Torrance and is a clinical professor at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. Leaving makeup on several nights in a row could cause an acne flare-up.

The morning after, she recommends cleaning with products made for acne-prone skin. Most will remove facial oils and may contain salicylic acid (a beta hydroxy acid that helps stop pores from clogging) or glycolic acid (an alpha-hydroxy acid that exfoliates the skin). Toners can also help remove surface oils, and cleansing can be followed by the application of topical benzoyl peroxide, which can help kill bacteria on the skin and keep pores from clogging.

On the other end of the spectrum is dry, sensitive skin, and its more severe cousin, eczema, a chronic skin condition that can cause extremely dry skin patches, rashes, itching and even blisters. For dry skin, Goodlerner says, use gentle cleansers and moisturizers, and avoid anything astringent that will strip the skin of its natural oils. Some with eczema might need cortisone cream to reduce the redness and inflammation, or they may need a prescription medication.

Goodlerner advises that before embarking on a busy holiday schedule, choose products that will make cleaning and makeup removal easy. Also, cosmetics that are oil-free or have extra moisturizers will keep the skin looking good the day after a late night.

### **Something's afoot**

Parties mean party dresses, which mean high heels -- very high heels. As in those trendy 4-, 5- or 6-inch stilettos that defy the laws of physics. They may look glamorous and stylish, but there's a price to pay: painful feet and aching legs.

"Many fashionable shoes now are narrow and pointy at the toe," says podiatrist Dr. Carolyn McAloon, adjunct clinical professor at the California School of Podiatric Medicine at Samuel Merritt University in Oakland. "They can cause pain and calluses and redness in the toes." All that, she says, comes from squishing feet into too-small, oddly shaped spaces. High heels put immense pressure on the ball of the foot, which can pinch nerves. Toes can develop corns from rubbing against the shoe. "After awhile," McAloon says, "the toes are going to complain."

When they do, make amends with this ritual: Soak feet in warm water and mineral salts. That soaking, McAloon says, helps increase circulation, soothe tired muscles and soften hard calluses, which can be removed with a pumice stone. Finish with a hydrating cream. Then, do some stretches, such as rotating the ankles and flexing and pointing the toes -- this will help stretch calf muscles and Achilles tendons, which can get stiff (those stretches can also be done while sitting with high heels on). Finally, ice the feet to reduce any swelling.

Don't make high heels a daily or even nightly habit -- cut back to a lower-heel shoe (about 2 inches) the next day, or, even better, flats that give some support, like tennis shoes.

Some lucky women, McAloon says, can walk for hours in heels and not feel any pain. The rest of us, however, have to suffer for our beauty. "It's important to remember," she says, "that foot pain is not

normal. And if your feet hurt the next day, it's a sign you overdid it."

### **Lights out**

Sleep is usually last on a long list of things to do this time of year. With parties, shopping, travel and more parties, catching a full eight hours of Z's becomes less and less likely as we head toward the new year.

But short-changing ourselves of sleep -- even for a couple of nights -- could mean bad news for our bodies and our psyches, says Dr. David Schulman, director of the Sleep Laboratory at Emory University in Atlanta. "One or two days of getting four to five hours of sleep a night," he says, "can have serious repercussions on our ability to focus, to remember things. It can affect things like driving, and it can make us more irritable."

We may tell ourselves we can get by on five or six hours, but doing that night after night, Schulman says, builds up a sleep shortage that may take weeks to fix.

Oh, and don't reach for the coffee to make it all better. It may perk you up a bit, but it's just masking some heavy-duty fatigue. For some, caffeine can also have serious side effects, such as heart palpitations, nervousness and anxiety.

The best strategy is trying to pay down that sleep deficit as quickly as possible, either by catching an extra hour or two at night, or by taking naps during the day.

Though alcohol may seem like a good idea to help fall asleep, it's a no-no, Schulman says. A nightcap may send you into dreamland quickly, but once your body starts metabolizing the alcohol, it can make you wake up again. So skip the alcohol whenever possible, or stop drinking at least three hours before going to bed.

### **Couch potatoes, unite**

With schedules ramped up during the holidays, it's not unusual for people to go AWOL from their gym routines and personal trainers. And that may not be such a bad thing, says Petra Kolber, a spokeswoman for the IDEA Health & Fitness Assn. and a Los Angeles-based fitness instructor and trainer. Those who are faithful to their workouts throughout the year deserve a little guilt-free rest. "A little time off isn't going to hurt anybody," she says.

That said, it's easy to turn a few days off into a complete downward spiral of inactivity and "Golden Girls" reruns. She recommends slipping in easy workouts whenever possible, like taking walks outdoors or popping in a yoga DVD. "Try to take your walks not for burning calories but for de-stressing and keeping your energy up," she says. "Moving is going to help you feel better," especially if you're used to being active, and if you happened to ingest the better part of a Thanksgiving turkey.

She also suggests grabbing some light dumbbells or elastic bands and doing exercises that hit multiple muscle groups, such as combining lunges with tricep kickbacks or squats with bicep curls. "If you're focused, it's amazing what you can do in 10 minutes," she says. As most people have some time off over the holidays, it's a good time to try something new, workout-wise, Kolber says, such as snowshoeing or snowboarding, or even one of those fitness video games. "If you're already fit, a video game won't take you over the edge," she says, "but you can have fun with the family and it will get you off the couch."

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