

# Vanderbilt experts warn overeating extends past the holidays

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Vanderbilt experts are asking Americans to focus beyond the Thanksgiving table when it comes to holiday overeating and the larger obesity epidemic facing the country. The struggle with obesity is year-round.

The common assumption that people put on five pounds over the holidays has been studied by scientists and actually found to be a myth, said Vanderbilt [obesity](#) expert Roger Cone, Ph.D., professor and chairman of Molecular Physiology & Biophysics.

In fact, weight gain from Thanksgiving through New Year's is, on average, closer to three-quarters of one pound to one pound over the holiday period.

And while this doesn't sound as drastic, what typically happens with obesity, Cone said, is people gain weight slowly and keep it on.

"It is not just [overeating](#) at holidays. We are chronically overeating and under-exercising in this country," Cone said. "And what happens then is your weight gradually creeps up."

"If we do become obese it is because there is a minor difference between what we are consuming and what we are burning," he said. "So the trick is to try to match your energy expenditure with your energy intake, to try to control your diet overall and keep it healthy and to try to up your activity until the two are in balance."

Obesity leads to health care costs that are 36 percent higher, on average, and a 77 percent increase in medication costs.

Liz Aleman, Healthy Children's Program Manager for Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, said obesity is the result of poor choices and behaviors more than genetics and metabolism, which means there is a lot a person can do to fight obesity.

Aleman has some tips that can apply not only to a healthy [Thanksgiving](#) dinner but also to a healthy lifestyle in general.

- Drink more water throughout meals to help you feel fuller, quicker.
- Be careful with your portions (one-half plate should be fruits and vegetables, one-fourth proteins and one-fourth grains.)
- Take a long walk after a meal; it is good for digestion and will make you feel better.
- Use available resources such as [eatbetteramerica.com](http://eatbetteramerica.com) and [mypyramid.gov](http://mypyramid.gov) to cook healthy versions of traditional recipes.
- Use whole grains instead of white for making bread, stuffing and pasta.
- Substitute applesauce for oil when making baked goods such as cookies and cakes.
- Use herbs instead of salt to add flavor to food.
- Adults should exercise 30 minutes a day, which can be divided up into 10 minute segments if necessary.
- Use local produce whenever possible because it tends to be healthier

due to maintaining its nutrients longer than produce that has traveled long distances.

Provided by Vanderbilt Medical Center

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