

Fitness expert says portion control, exercise key to weight management

January 6 2015, by Mara Kerkez



The holidays are robust with huge dinners, parties and festivities that make it easy to overindulge without realizing it. But there are several ways to strike a balance between maintaining holiday merriment and weight management. What's important, according to Len Kravitz, associate professor of Exercise Science at the University of New Mexico, is to stick with an exercise program, if you're on one, or to move more when you eat more.

Most people tend to put on a few pounds during the holidays and, without exercise, they will keep the added weight as well. "Be aware of two things," Kravitz said, "how much you are eating and how much you are drinking - there are a lot of calories in alcohol. Also, on special holiday outings be particularly alert to sugary desserts, as they taste delicious but contain a lot of calories. When it comes to [weight management](#) during the holidays, portion control is key, and moving more."

There is a new area of research called 'spontaneous movement' which indicates that people can burn upwards of 400 calories a day just by staying active during their waking day. "Many new diet and [exercise programs](#) are starting with this 'move more' approach, and it seems to be very successful," Kravitz said.

Spontaneous movement refers to all non-exercise related movement such as walking from the parking lot to the mall; walking from your car to the office building; doing a walking meeting instead of a seated meeting; even walking around your house from room to room. It appears from the research that people who just spontaneously keep moving during their waking day, are able to burn a lot of [calories](#).

An added benefit of exercise is the reduction of stress, which many people experience during the holiday, and a happier mood state. "Mood is influenced by psychosocial, psycho-physiological, biochemical and environmental factors," Kravitz said. "It appears that cardiovascular and [resistance exercise](#) can positively affect different mood states including tension, fatigue, anger and vigor in normal and clinical populations (Lane & Lovejoy, 2002; Fox, 1999). It has been shown that a single session of 25-60 minutes of [aerobic exercise](#), at low, moderate or high intensities, increases positive mood feelings while decreasing negative mood feelings.

In spring 2014, students in UNM PEP305, a course that offers an overview of the educational concepts, performance techniques, program design and leadership skills needed to teach group [exercise](#), created a program called [Don't Sit, Get Fit](#). It offers easy and effective ways to maintain movement at work such as take the stairs instead of the elevator; stand up and raise your calves throughout the day; jog in place next to your work station; take a walk break before, during or after your lunch break, and more. The program also offers movement ideas while at home.

"The key to living healthier is simple," Kravitz said, "move your body and eat a heart healthy diet, one that emphasizes produce, monounsaturated fats and protein from fish, while limiting how much saturated and trans fats you eat."

Provided by University of New Mexico

Citation: Fitness expert says portion control, exercise key to weight management (2015, January 6) retrieved 5 May 2024 from

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