

Too much couch and too many calories a bad mix for holiday season

18 December 2015, by Leha Byrd

Though many may relish the opportunity to do more lounging and eating during the holiday season, health care professionals attest that too much of the couch mixed with too many calories can lead to repercussions for your health. Failing to maintain physical activity during the holidays can lead to setbacks, trigger new health conditions or compromise existing ones, particularly for those with health issues such as diabetes or high cholesterol.

Lorena Salom, instructor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences in the College of Humanities and Sciences at Virginia Commonwealth University, offers advice for all ages on how to get moving and stay moving during the holidays, while still enjoying the season's staples.

In what ways can people with health issues stay active during the holiday season?

Most health conditions are not negatively affected by exercise. In fact, it's the complete opposite. Participating in regular [physical activity](#) conveys a wide range of health benefits for those with or without [health issues](#). In case of injuries or low fitness levels, exercises can be modified to allow all individuals to be [physically active](#). Going on walks, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking in the back of the parking lot, marching or dancing during television commercial breaks and playing with children can all be great strategies to be physically active during the holiday season.

Why is it important for people with health issues to stay active this time of year when we tend to do more eating and lounging?

While the benefits of [regular physical activity](#) and exercise are well known, most individuals are not aware that lack of physical activity is detrimental to health. When combining sedentary behavior with poor or excess eating as occurs during the [holiday](#)

[season](#), health status can be affected negatively. Therefore, it is important to just get moving!

What are the dangers associated with inactivity, particularly for those with health issues?

Insufficient levels of physical activity are a major risk factor for the development of chronic diseases and for mortality. Individuals who participate in low levels of physical activity are at a greater risk of cardiovascular diseases, cancers, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and osteoporosis.

What are some contemporary ways for people to stay active during family gatherings and holiday dinners?

It is important to think of physical activity as an opportunity for fun activities and family bonding rather than a task. There are many ways of staying active during the holidays, such as challenging your loved ones to a game of touch football or a dance off. If the weather cooperates, it is always a good idea to get some fresh air and work off some of those holiday calories with an after-dinner walk. If not, many of the new game systems have games that incorporate physical activity such as "Just Dance" or Wii Fit.

Are there any age limits or specifications for physical activity?

Everyone can benefit from physical activity, from kids to grandparents. Staying active is all about awareness and oftentimes it is difficult to gauge just how sedentary we are throughout the day. Pedometers and fitness trackers can even remind us to get moving if we have been sitting for too long. While there are many ways to be physically active, it can be as simple as accumulating 10,000 steps per day in order to get the health benefits of physical activity. There is really no age limit for physical activity, it's all about moving enough to get our hearts working. While there is a close

relationship between physical activity and health benefits (the greater amounts of exercise at greater intensities, the greater the [health benefits](#)), every step takes you a little closer to better [health](#).

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

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