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Beyond Avoiding Weight Gain During the Holidays How to Lose Weight in the Season of Celebrations

(Cerritos, CA – December 20, 2004) Several studies have shown that overweight people gain more weight during the holidays than non-overweight people. In one study, Drs. Baker and Kirschenbaum also found that overweight participants in professional weight control programs gained 500% more weight during holiday weeks compared to non-holiday weeks (in Health Psychology, 1998, 17: 367-370). This means that holidays, with the continuous celebrations and ever-present high-fat and calorie-dense foods, are risky times for those who seek weight loss.

But research also shows that weight controllers can not only learn to manage the challenges of the holidays, they can master them. Research has pointed a number of critical elements of effective weight control during such high risk occasions. Consider taking the following steps if you want to join the ranks of those actually lose weight during the holidays.

1. Establish a solid foundation on high-risk days. The foundation for effective weight management is activity. Almost every study on individuals who succeed in maintaining weight loss over time shows that frequent activity contributes substantially to success. So, on days with celebrations planned, if you begin the day with a brisk walk or some other activity, you are much more likely stay focused on your goals and get your body activated. Your metabolic rate (the amount of energy your body needs at rest) can either work for you or against you. If you stay active every day, you'll keep your metabolic rate from becoming too efficient (needing fewer calories).

In addition, controlled eating, especially in the morning, will also help you stay focused, building a foundation of the kind of habits that you'll need throughout your life for successful weight control. Consider having a relatively high-protein breakfast (like

an egg white omelet or fat-free cheese melted on an English muffin) to keep your hunger relatively quiet prior to the party.

2. Plan ahead. When you plan ahead, you can predict and control your world. For example, think about your next party:

- Who is going to be there?
- What kind of food will be served?
- When are you going to leave?

You can call your host and get a preview of the menu. You can make a list of what you will eat, with whom you will talk, and how you will stay focused on successful weight control even during the party. Controlling alcohol intake may be critical along those lines. How about considering a 2-drink limit? That leads to better restraint and better focus on the big picture of your life.

3. Avoid starvation before celebration. Starving before a big holiday meal or party can increase the chances of binge eating. Starving produces deprivation and strong biological drives to eat anything. An alternative approach would have you eating low-fat low-sugar foods throughout the day as usual, and making sure to eat some source protein immediately prior to the event (e.g., low-fat beef or turkey jerky; fat-free cheese or yogurt).

4. Study the food scene. After arriving at the celebration, you can quickly survey the available options. Perhaps you will notice fresh fruits or vegetables that will work for your eating plan. You might also discover that the main course will keep you on target (for example, a turkey dinner can work very well). This initial survey should enable you to avoid the incredibly calorie-dense, high-fat chips and dips, nuts, and appetizers.

5. Monitor the details of your eating and activities. The research on this point is especially clear. Those who write down virtually everything they eat and their activities are far more likely to lose weight during the holidays, and during non-holiday weeks, as well. If you use goals for your eating plan (like no more than 20 fat grams per day), then by self-monitoring you're eating every day, you can bring those goals to life – and use them as motivators. Every time you eat something, you'll compare that food to the 20 fat gram goal and see if you are on course to beat the goal. In a similar way, if you use a pedometer to keep track of your steps, then by monitoring the number of steps taken each day, you'll encourage yourself to reach your step goal (like 10,000 steps per day).

6. Refocus your holiday season. You can break the holiday tradition of focusing on special foods and parties. Why not focus on other people, special projects, helping others, and finding new ways to relax?

To learn more about Healthy Living Academies, the first therapeutic weight reduction and control programs for adolescents, or AEG's other therapeutic schools and programs, visit www.aspeneducation.com or www.healthylivingacademies.com, or call (866) 364-0808.

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