

THE STORY OF HOLIDAY WEIGHT GAIN And What You Can Do About It

**By
Trish Schwartz**

Holiday weight gain is a common occurrence for many people. Right around January 5th, people finally succumb to getting on the weight scale and stand there in disbelief for a few minutes wondering how that happened, again! Then, in a moment of denial, they get off the scale, pick it up and shake it a few times and recheck the calibration knob. They get back on the scale one more time in hopes that there was really something wrong with it. Nope! Its true, you gained 10 pounds! The following is a scenario of how holiday weight gain subtly happens and what you can do about it this year before it happens to you again.

October 1, 2003. Halloween candy monopolizes the front lobby of every food store! It has been like that since just after Labor Day, in September. So, does that mean your holiday eating frenzy has just begun? Maybe, and maybe not. It all depends on how “out of control” you become and if you allow it to happen.

Many people buy up their stock of Halloween candy long before they really need it. The temptation to dip in a little bit here and a little bit there lingers in your cupboards for a good two months before the kids ever come knocking. Before you know it, the whole stash is gone and you have to go out and get more before October 31st. Let’s see. Two bags of snickers bite size candy bars at 100 calories each translates to about 4000 calories. If you ate one bag each month prior to Halloween, you would take in 8000 excess calories. That translates to two pounds. That is just the beginning.

Then, after Halloween, you put into effect a “candy control” rule at your house. Each child can have three pieces of candy after dinner each night until it is gone. Of course, the control monitor gets to have some too. That’s you! And we all know that the control monitor gets to have a little more because you are bigger, so, you sneak 5 pieces a night for two weeks. That is an extra 500 calories a day for 14 days. You just over consumed another 7000 calories in two weeks. Another two pounds!

“Ok”, you say, “I’ll be good until Thanksgiving and then I’ll only over eat on Thanksgiving Day”. Yeah, right! Long about two weeks after Halloween, your office buddies start bringing in their excess Halloween candy as well as practicing their cookie and candy recipes for the holidays. Twice a week, someone brings in a plate of goodies. You sweat it out until about 11:00 a.m. and then lunch time hunger sabotages your efforts to refrain. “Well, just a little appetizer” you say, and before you know it you have downed three cookies and added an extra 1800 calories to your week and that is only if you falter four out of the five work days. In two weeks, you have gained another pound. Are you with me? That’s five pounds so far.

Now, its almost Thanksgiving and you realize your clothes are starting to get tight and you don't want to gain beyond repair. You make a mental note to go rejoin your neighborhood gym the Monday after Thanksgiving in hopes of curtailing any further holiday weight gain. Thanksgiving Day comes around and you go out for a nice long walk with your dog. You even allow the dog to persuade you into a little light jogging because you know that pumpkin pie with whip cream is inevitable. Well, the pumpkin pie was inevitable. So was the double helping each of turkey and ham, mashed potatoes and gravy, dressing, warm dinner rolls with butter (and a heaping tablespoon at that...after all, Thanksgiving only comes once a year), and two different jello salads made with a cream cheese and whip cream base. When does the pumpkin pie come in? Well, after the second bout of thanksgiving dinner, four hours later! After all, you did go for a walk that morning! Here is just a little fitness trivia for you. You walked off about 200 calories when you took the dog out that morning. You consumed over 5000 calories in your Thanksgiving Day gluttony. That's not to mention the calories consumed at breakfast, perhaps a big slice of banana bread with two tablespoons of butter or a big fat homemade cinnamon roll. Add another 400 – 500 calories! The end result of Thanksgiving Day is a one pound weight gain. Now, you are up six pounds.

First thing Monday morning, you hit the gym. You work out so hard you cannot walk for a week. So, you burned off 500 calories at the gym on Monday, but you did not do anything else the rest of the week because you could not move! In addition, you could not waste the Thanksgiving Day leftovers. You still had to eat the cherry pie and the pecan pie that you did not get to on Thanksgiving Day, as well as the rest of the banana bread. You gained another pound that week. Total weight gain to date is seven pounds.

“That's it”, you say after witnessing the destruction on the scale the next Monday morning. You hit the gym three times a week for the next two weeks. In addition, you eat less and don't touch any junk. You dropped two pounds. “Yes”, you think to yourself. “I'm in control again”. That weekend, you go to two holiday parties, one for your spouse's job and one for your job. Back on the scale Monday morning. You are back up the two pounds you just lost. “Gosh darn it”, you say, “I'm just not going to beat myself up this year, I'm going to enjoy the holidays and eat what I want. I'll get back on track after the new year”.

January 2nd you get on the scale. Ten pounds up! Time to go on a diet, and on and on and on. You get the picture. A ten-pound weight gain during the holidays is not uncommon and not difficult to do, if you allow yourself to stray from your normal, fitness lifestyle.

Here is the solution. First of all, you should be working out the whole time. Do not allow the holidays to get in the way of your workout. If you have not been working out, you should be. And not just during the holidays, but always. Dedicate 200 minutes a week to exercising, whatever it is, and stick to it. During the holidays, you might add an extra 60 minutes a week to offset a few holiday treats that are not a normal part of your diet.

Secondly, try to make a few rules about what you will do and what you will NOT do throughout the holidays. Stick to those rules! Yes, it's the holidays and you should allow yourself some of those treats, after all, you only live once and eating yummy baked goods and candies is one of life's pleasures. Do not deprive yourself. That is not healthy, either. But, do not have a food "free-for-all"! Don't buy your Halloween candy until the day before Halloween. The stores are NOT going to run out of it. Take healthy snacks to work with you so that the holiday baked goods don't overwhelm you with temptation. Visualize your health and your physique. Remind yourself before you reach for that cookie how you want to look and feel. Chances are you will walk away from that cookie tray and go indulge in a fresh, sweet juicy apple, instead.

Then, on Thanksgiving Day, eat one reasonable helping of each item at the dinner table, not TWO! Since your meal is probably much larger than your normal meals, you don't need to eat again later! Have a big piece of pumpkin pie and be done with it! In addition, don't pile the butter on your banana bread that morning. There is nothing wrong with a piece of banana bread. But, there is something very wrong with two tablespoons of butter on top of it! As far as leftovers go, make normal sized meals out of them. Finish up that pie, but only have one small piece a day. If you feel you have overeaten, then do a little extra exercise.

Finally, when you go to holiday parties, eat a normal meal. Scope out what is available at the party and make a good, balanced choice like you would normally do as part of a fitness lifestyle. There are always better choices available to you. If your friends or family give you gifts of holiday treats, take a little bit of it and turn around and give the rest of it away to someone else as a gift, perhaps an office co-worker who is single, alone (because their family lives far away) and, absolutely does not have a weight problem or a needy family that belongs to your church.

Holiday weight gain is not inevitable, it is your choice. This year, don't go there! Remember how disgusted you were last year and the year before and how difficult it was to get that 10 pounds off. Keep your focus on sticking to a consistent "healthy and fit" lifestyle.

Trish Schwartz has been a fitness professional for over 20 years. Get more information on her web site: www.fitwise.net