

Reduce Stress and Prevent Weight Gain Right into the New Year

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For many of us, this time of the year can be stressful and demanding. We're rushing nonstop, shopping for gifts, entertaining family and friends from out of town, and attending multiple parties for work and family. At the same time, we're trying to keep up with our daily work and home routine. During these times, we often neglect our well-being the most—and as a result, have a hard time keeping our stress level and weight under control.

Maintaining a healthy weight based on height is one the key components of the formula to prevent long-term chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and kidney disease, among others. Keeping stress levels down has also been found to be essential for optimal overall well-being. Physical exercise, nutrition and stress reduction techniques help you keep stress and weight gain in check if you practice them consistently with determination, planning and a dose of discipline.

Always set goals for yourself such as, "I will be relaxed and calm," "I will take 5-10 minutes a day for relaxation and meditation and take time for physical exercises," and "I will maintain my pre-holiday weight (hopefully, your healthy weight) during the holidays and throughout the year."

Make 2005 the year of "No More New Year's Resolutions." You can start the new year on the right track, if you have the will and desire. Set a goal to start investing in your long-term well-being by giving yourself time to relax, being sensible with your eating habits

and staying disciplined with your physical exercise regimen.

Tips to Reduce Stress and Weight Gain

STRESS REDUCTION

- Spend 20 to 30 minutes a day doing what relaxes you the most—taking a warm bath with aromatherapy candles, practicing yoga or tai chi, or doing a hobby you find relaxing.
- Every two or three days, close your eyes and listen to your favorite relaxing music for at least 20 minutes, concentrating on the rhythm of your breathing.
- Take 10-15 minutes to page through your favorite magazine in a relaxing part of your home. Prepare that environment to avoid noise and interruptions. Turn off your mobile phone, disconnect your land phone, and do whatever else you need to in order to maintain a still environment.

WEIGHT CONTROL

- Weigh yourself before the holidays to get your pre-holiday weight. Weigh in every two to three weeks and wear your tightest jeans at least once a week to monitor your weight status.
- If you had a day of poor eating, don't give up. It's okay—we all have those days. Just resume your healthy and balanced eating the next day.
- Think small portions when planning your daily meals or when attending parties. Cut your food intake by half at mealtime, especially during the holidays.
- Eat most of your meals throughout the day when you're the most active, starting with a big breakfast.



Stop eating after 8 p.m. For most of us, this is the time our bodies start to slow down.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

- Exercise regularly—at least 4-5 times weekly for a minimum of 40-60 minutes.
- When going shopping, park far away and take time to do at least a 15 to 20 minute fast walk around the mall prior to shopping. This will help burn some extra calories.
- Keep TV watching to minimum—no more than two hours per night. Keep yourself active and moving!

• Drink plenty of water during your physical exercise activity and throughout the day to keep well hydrated for optimal body functioning and health. *Giselle Roque de Escobar, RD, LD/N is a registered dietitian/certified fitness professional. She is creator of the "Your ABCD's For Total Body Fitness" video series and CRUNCH: Cardio Salsa. She is also the host and creator of ESPN International "Mente y Cuerpo" with model and actress Daisy Fuentes. Visit*

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