

don't put on a winter coat

Words: Jill Stoppel

Fall and early winter are busy times of the year, packed with beloved traditions, such as social events, festivals, and holidays. Unfortunately, another tradition many of us would rather avoid, is that of abandoning our fitness and nutrition goals for a few months. Year after year, we let our health go throughout the holiday season and by New Year's we have a list of problems we need to fix. Clients come to me in January; feeling frazzled and out of shape, wish lists of health-related New Year's resolutions in their pockets.

This year, how about starting a new winter tradition? How about committing to placing wellness among your top priorities, starting right this moment, so you don't have to do damage control later.

Did you just moan thinking, **"But that takes all the fun out of the holidays!"**? It doesn't have to. By fine-tuning our thinking about this time of year, planning ahead, committing to making good choices

and employing smart exercise methods, we can take responsibility, enjoy the winter months, and enter the New Year feeling fantastic.

What makes this time of year such a pitfall for so many? Beginning with football parties and fall festivals, revving up with the Halloween candy haul, exploding with Thanksgiving and the onset of the winter holiday parties and family gatherings, finally ending with a New Year's extravaganza, the entire season, for many, revolves around decadent food. The mindset has become one of treating ourselves and others, and ultimately over-indulgence. Meanwhile, all these activities leave us too busy to fit in our normal exercise routine — we're lucky if we just miss a few workouts, while many end up on an extended vacation from their fitness routine.

Here are some tips to help you gear up and commit to health, ideas to help you devise a game plan and practical information to help squeeze an effective workout in, even if you don't have much time.



Adjust your Mindset

Don't accept a setback this season! This is the time of year when many fall into the "I won't worry about it now, I'll fix it in January." trap. Get your mind in gear for maintaining, or even improving, your fitness level throughout the holidays this year, starting right now.

- ✿ Set some new goals. Consider signing up for a holiday 5K, or commit to an event in the early spring such as a triathlon, fitness competition or a beach vacation.
- ✿ Create accountability for yourself by scheduling with a workout buddy or personal trainer.
- ✿ Find a new love. Sign up for a fitness class or sport that you've never tried, like kickboxing, spinning, boot camp, Pilates, yoga, tennis or golf. Check your community centers and colleges for low-cost introductory classes.
- ✿ Schedule a session with a personal trainer for new inspiration. Most trainers even offer express sessions if your schedule is packed.

Remember: make sure your goals focus on your fitness and not your figure.



Make careful choices

Perhaps the biggest challenge of the holidays is all of the food available! Like delectable, edible booby-traps, cookies and other holiday treats are available at every turn. Calorie-laden buffets adorn every party. You bring home a holiday ham... and pretty soon, you feel like you're turning into the holiday ham! But remember, the choice is yours. Commit to choosing well.

- ✿ Maintain a healthy relationship with food. Before taking a bite of that cookie, consider what your body will gain. Will it provide healthy energy and nutrients? Or will it just help your Santa impersonation? Be conscious of how food intake affects you and what type of fuel you're providing yourself. This will help you make good eating choices.
- ✿ Don't equate food with caring. Many people use food as a way to show their affection. Neighbors bake cookies, friends and family create lavish meals, and we even treat ourselves. The meal is the centerpiece of many holidays and gatherings. It takes willpower and grace to accept the kind gesture, but politely refuse overindulging. You can, and should, do it!
- ✿ Remember that food offers a very temporary sense of satisfaction, but your health is a stronghold to enjoy day in and day out.
- ✿ Don't use food or alcohol to fill an emotional void or as a stress-buster. It will only fill up the void between you and your jeans. Instead, rely on exercise to work off those stress-induced unhealthy hormones.

Whether it's a football party, a family Thanksgiving dinner, or a festive holiday party, this plan will help you power through the event, feeling great, enjoying yourself, and keeping your healthy diet in check.

✿ Before you get ready, do a 20-minute interval training session to jump-start your fat-burning metabolism. Amazingly, just 20 minutes of high-intensity interval training can boost your body's fat-burning for several hours after the workout. It will increase your energy, help curb your appetite, and you'll remain focused on your accomplishments. You'll also be less likely to overindulge and sabotage the hard work you just put in. Not only that, but you'll look and feel great.

✿ Have a healthy, satisfying meal or snack before facing a smorgasbord of temptations.

✿ Wear something fitted. Showing off your body will help you remember what you've worked this hard for, and will help you remember when you're overeating. You don't want to feel like unzipping your pants after your meal!

✿ Sample, but don't over-indulge. Try to pick veggies and healthy options at the buffet. Go for flavorful or spicy foods that are satisfying...you'll eat less of them than bland things. Also, stay away from sugar.

✿ Choose beverages wisely. Remember, alcohol slows down your metabolism, so having more than one alcoholic beverage will counteract that hard work you did. You'll also spend several days working off the alcohol you consumed rather than burning fat. Artificial sweeteners can increase cravings, so it's also best to also stay away from diet drinks.

✿ Focus on conversation, dancing, or other activities. You're there to enjoy the gathering! Make an effort to really get to know people (but not the bartender!)



Plan ahead

This time of year, we're especially susceptible to interruptions and over-scheduling.

- * Schedule your workouts at least a week in advance. Hire a trainer now to help keep you accountable. Make sure you keep your gym shoes and clothes in your office or car.
- * Plan healthy meals, and as often as possible, prepare them yourself.
- * Keep healthy snacks handy at all times. Having a bag of almonds or raw veggies handy will help you pass up the temptation of holiday treats.
- * Beware of interruptions. I make it a point to do my workouts first thing in the morning even before I check my email or voicemail. As a business owner, if I don't do that, I may take the chance of getting caught in a meeting or project and missing my workout all together.



Don't skimp on your exercise

You may be committed to maintaining your wellness, but the fact remains that it's a busy season; you're likely to find yourself squeezed for exercise time.

- * Starting early in the season (as soon as you read this article!), increase the frequency of your workouts. Get ahead before you get behind. Adding extra exercise days now will help build yourself a little leeway, especially for holiday weeks when getting to the gym may be all but impossible.
- * When short on time, carve out enough time for a quick 20-minute interval-training session. I love incorporating intervals into my client's cardio training. It cuts down on time and actually burns more fat. When you interval train, you want to push your body to move faster for a short period of 1-2 minutes and then back off and recover for 1 minute and repeat.
- * Don't forget to squeeze in some strength training! These three basic moves are the most effective choices for a quick strength workout: lunges, pushups and crunches. Treat it like a circuit and push yourself through these exercises adding enough weight to increase your heart rate and burn calories. Alternate with bursts of high-intensity cardio for a super-charged fat blasting workout that only takes minutes!

Want a detailed interval workout? Contact a personal trainer or visit www.ExcelWellnessStudio.com for a downloadable workout.



Most importantly, enjoy yourself!

A commitment to health shouldn't squelch the fun or spirit out of the holidays. Embrace the meaning of the season and work wellness into your activities. You may not get a major workout, but you'll enjoy your friends and family, spend more time moving and less time eating by keeping busy.

- * Bring a Frisbee or football to toss during halftime or after the meal.
- * Switch up a dinner out with friends to an ice skating outing or a night out dancing.
- * Explore local outdoor festivities such as Christmas tree lightings, the luminary walk at the Overland Park Arboretum, or enjoy a stroll on the Plaza.
- * If there's snow, call some buddies and go sledding or build a snowman – or do a good deed and shovel the driveway for an elderly neighbor or relative.
- * Don't forget to take the time to rest! Including much-needed sleep and down-time on your schedule will give you energy to keep up with your exercise routine and all of your activities.

Make a commitment to yourself and start planning right now for one precious gift you'll give yourself this year – your own health.



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