

Watch That Holiday Gorging

This week's column, **Watch That Holiday Gorging**, comes from Dr. Robert Keith, Alabama Cooperative Extension System nutrition and health specialist and Auburn University professor of nutrition and food science.

Talk about a killjoy. One of the stories making its rounds in daily newspapers around the country and on the Internet is that gorging over the holidays may do more than make you feel bad. It even may increase the risk of heart attack by as much as four times within the two hours following consumption.

The finding is based on a study presented shortly before Thanksgiving at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2000. Bad things do follow overeating, the study found. For starters, blood clots more easily and quickly after the consumption of a big meal. Likewise, the fat levels in the blood increase along with blood pressure.

Actually, these findings aren't new. Medical researchers have known about them for a long time. But how serious is this threat? Probably not that serious for healthy people, even as old as age 50, with no serious heart disease risks. Granted, all that overeating might make you feel bad the rest of the day, but other than indigestion and sluggishness, you'll probably be okay.

But it's a different case for obese and sedentary people with heart problems or with a risk of heart disease. The blood clotting and elevated blood pressure that typically follows overeating could be just enough to push some of these people over the edge — the reason why it's important to take stock of these risks, especially when the allure of big meals is stronger than at any other time of year.

You still can enjoy the traditional Christmas Day feasting, for example, but just make sure you go easy on the calories. Instead of pigging out and consuming thousands of calories, limit your intake to moderate, reasonable amounts of food.

Also, consider following these safeguards---First, eat slowly. It's no guarantee against overeating, but it can slow down the number of calories you consume.

Second, back away from the table when you feel full and go do something else. If you can't get a certain food out of your mind even hours later, go back and consume a smaller portion of it.

Third, exercise. It even can be as simple as walking. In fact, walking is arguably one of the most effective safeguards against holiday weight gain, largely because it often proves to be the most convenient form of exercise over the holidays.

Walking also is useful in getting you out of the house and away from food. But even more important, as an aerobic form of exercise, walking can counteract some of the physiological effects associated with overeating, such as quicker blood clotting.

Adequate intakes of vitamin E and omega 3 fatty acids readily available in fish also can safeguard against the quicker blood clogging associated with overindulgence. So can a daily dose of baby aspirin.

But caution remains the most effective safeguard. If you're at risk of heart disease, you should shy away from the extra calories, no matter how tempting.

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