



for your best health

NOT QUITE SO HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Ask Your Pharmacist

The season of celebration often becomes a time of stress, overeating, and binges. Holiday stress is a recognized occurrence, and while not technically a disease, it can be debilitating. Low energy and stress is often directly related to foods and digestion, and gaining weight this time of the year is not unusual either.

There are programmed meals in which you can eat three to four times as much as usual. With gatherings, parties, celebrations and food coming this season, our stress levels and digestive functions can take a beating.

Digestion and proper absorption of vitamins and minerals directly affect energy production and the ability to cope with stress. Many people have digestive problems. Many of the top-selling drugs are digestive aids, and people rely on medication, especially during the holidays. The process of controlling acid in digestion is important, but perhaps more important are digestive enzymes.

The human body makes over twenty enzymes capable of digesting proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and simple sugars. We get enzymes from food, particularly plant foods, and their use is essential to proper health. The body uses energy digesting food. If foods are high in sugar, even more energy is expelled and, as a result, we become tired. Reducing sugar intake during the holidays is difficult, but can really make a difference in the way you feel.

Studies have proven that supplementing certain enzymes can actually improve health and energy in people with digestive problems. Enzymes not only aid in the digestion of nutrients, they are also involved in the use of nutrients.

Vitamins and minerals do not create energy. You can religiously take the greatest vitamin product and it will not help without enzymes. Enzymes also aid in the manufacturing of B vitamins, which help control stress levels.

Deficiencies of B vitamins may be responsible for many imbalances in the body, including our ability to cope with mental and physical stress. The B vitamins are considered energy vitamins and yet

they are partially responsible for keeping us calm. B vitamins are water soluble, meaning they are transported through water for use. The body eliminates them quickly, and nutritionists believe B vitamins should be taken twice a day.

Over the holiday season many people consume foods and drinks that are not usually part of their normal diet, potentially leading to harmful interactions with their medications. Some foods can decrease or increase the effects of a drug or cause seriously dangerous side effects. For example, spinach, grapes and aged cheese are all rich in tyramine. If you are on a Monoamine Oxidase (MAO) Inhibitor (i.e. Parnate), such tyramine rich foods may cause a serious increase in blood pressure. It is therefore important to consult your pharmacist who can check for interactions between drugs, food, and alcohol.

INCREASED ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

An increase in fatty and rich foods combined with higher consumption of alcoholic beverages can lead to health issues and possibly alter the effectiveness of some medications. Medically categorized as a depressant, alcohol initially produces feelings of relaxation and well being once it reaches the brain, causing the user to have less control over decisions and coordination. Other biological effects of alcohol include increased body temperature, increased perspiration, and increased urination (due to diuretic effects).

After it travels through the bloodstream, alcohol enters the liver where it becomes metabolized into non-alcohol components, including glucose (which eventually becomes stored as fat). The kidneys then clear the remaining components from the bloodstream by way of urine.

Consuming alcohol, therefore, will have an effect on most medications that work in the central nervous system. In particular, drinking alcohol while using a Serotonin Selective Reuptake Inhibitor (Zoloft) could impair mental and motor skills. Alcohol, when on a medication that treats insomnia, could result in increased sedation.

WEIGHT GAIN

Weight gain during the holidays is another issue. It is therefore important that you limit your caloric intake

Visit our pharmacy or website to learn more about Holiday Moderation

HOLIDAYS (Continued)

and eat smaller portions throughout the day.

Studies now show that most of the problems associated with the holiday season have at least some origin in the diet we consume during November and December. Let's consider some suggestions that will hopefully offer you some aid and comfort this year.

KEEP SWEETS AS TREATS. Obviously, we increase our sugar consumption during the holidays. Think about it: from Halloween's 'Trick or Treating' to the 'Super Bowl Punch', we are inundated with sugar-laden foods. As a result, the body must deal with elevated levels of simple carbohydrates, which forces our body to respond with insulin.

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Simple carbohydrates come from many sources other than sweets. Refined breads, pasta, white rice, and some starches break down in the body in the same manner as sugar and are utilized by the body immediately. This gives us a "spike" of glucose, some quick energy, followed by the body's adjustment with insulin. As a result, we don't keep the energy too long, and in fact, may actually be tired two or three hours later.

We also know that sugar affects our intestinal tract. That is why doctors see patients at the first of the year complaining about unexplained digestive problems, elimination problems, and yeast infections. With these disorders, one can usually look toward an improper balance of nutrients in the digestive system. Part of the dietary plan against yeast conditions is a move toward higher protein diets and the elimination of simple carbohydrates.

Excessive sugar is also a problem in mood. Anxiety and stress are not relieved by eating sweets, even though chocolate is said to help. The reason is biochemical; chocolate has chemicals that enhance our endorphins, the biochemical switches for mood. Sugar on the other hand, blocks the neurotransmitters that allow our endorphins to work properly. This blockage literally keeps us from happiness.

With the number of sweets we are exposed to during the holidays, it is too much of a temptation to indulge. That extra piece of fudge or fruitcake may satisfy a craving and should be a part of the holiday fare, but consider moderation. The moderation theme may keep you happier than the added craving, may keep you higher in energy, and certainly may keep you from the added calories that could signal the all-too-familiar New Year's Resolution for diets.

If you really want to be energetic this holiday, stick to complex carbohydrates as the main food group. Complex carbohydrates break down into glucose at a much slower pace, spreading the energy system over a longer time period and promoting transit, not fermentation, through the GI tract. This could help with the elimination problems, add energy instead of yeast, and provide the sort of energy that keeps us active and in an aerobic state throughout the day.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are always the foods leftover from holiday parties, long after the booze and fudge are gone. Eat smart, and start off your New Year with vitality and one less resolution. It can, indeed, keep the stress away!

Nutritionists will tell you that the best dietary tip they can offer is to get cardiovascular exercise during the holidays. They realize food management alone will not keep you healthy and vibrant. Take a brisk walk, enjoy the season, and don't let the holidays control your emotions. You control the holidays with energy and stress management. To our other readers, have a glorious Holiday season. Enjoy the spirit of the season, don't feel guilty about eating, and treat yourself as well as you treat others.